

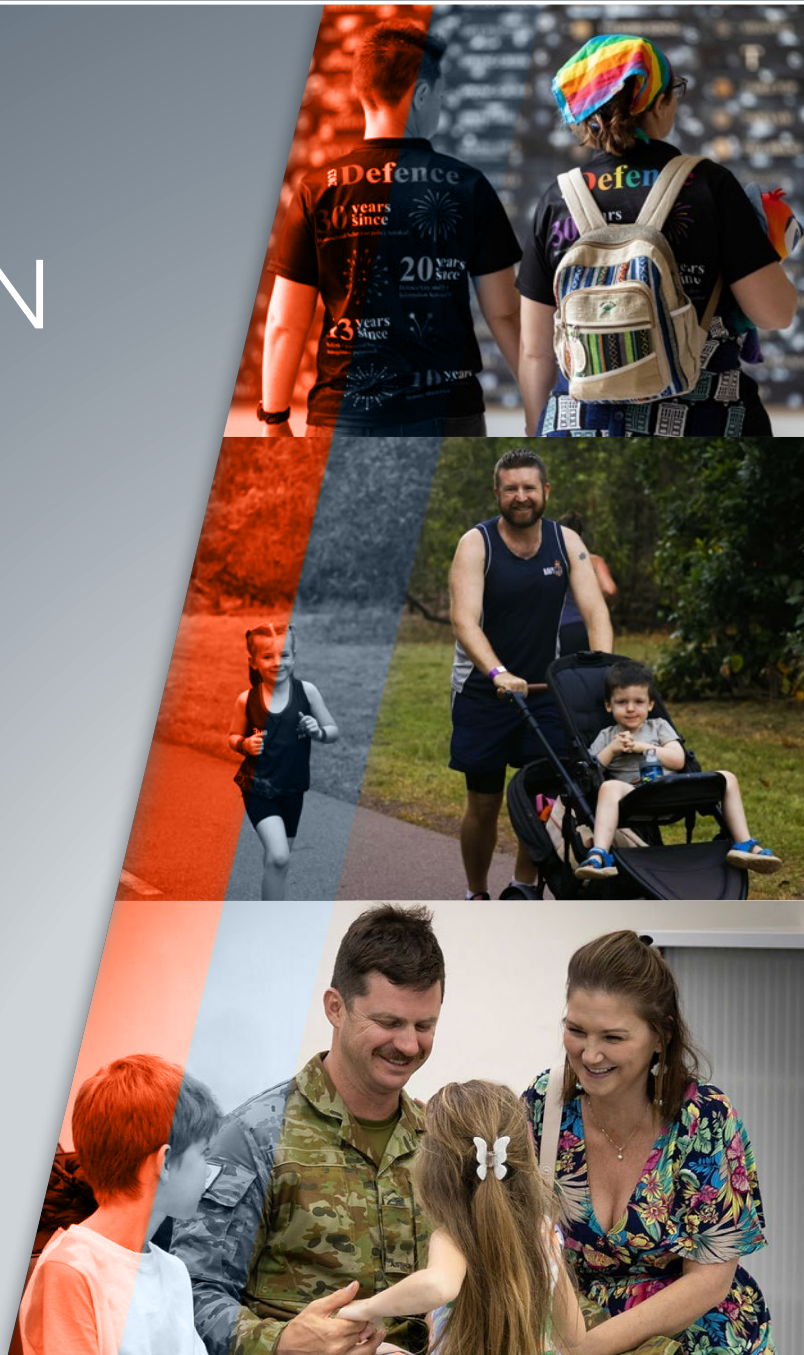


Australian Government

Defence

Department of Veterans' Affairs

DEFENCE AND VETERAN FAMILY WELLBEING STRATEGY 2025–2030





To defend Australia and its national interests in order
to advance Australia's security and prosperity
www.defence.gov.au



This document includes information about mental health, bereavement and suicide that readers may find distressing. If you need to talk to someone, the following organisations can help:



Open Arms

Open Arms is the leading provider of free mental health assessment and counselling for ADF members, veterans and families. They offer both individual and relationship counselling to help build strong and healthy relationships at all stages of family life.

 1800 011 046
 www.openarms.gov.au



Defence Member and Family Helpline

The Helpline is available 24/7 to assist ADF members and families. The Helpline provides assessment, advice, assistance or referral depending on the needs of the ADF member and their family.

 1800 624 608
 www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/defence-member-family-helpline


ADF Chaplains

Chaplains provide pastoral, spiritual, religious and welfare support.

 1300 333 362
 www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/chaplaincy-services



ADF Mental Health All Hours Support Line

Mental health and wellbeing advice for ADF members and families.

 1800 628 036
 www.defence.gov.au/health/dmh/allhourssupportline.asp



13 YARN

13YARN is the national crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.

 13 92 76
 www.13yarn.org.au



1800 IMSICK

1800 IMSICK is a national 24/7 nurse triage and health support line for ADF members if they become ill or injured after hours or are not near a Defence health facility.

 1800 467 425
 www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/1800-imsick



1800 VETERAN

1800 VETERAN is DVA's general phone number. It is available between 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. It's a way of finding out about the wealth of support offered by DVA.

 1800 838 372
 www.dva.gov.au



1800 RESPECT

1800 RESPECT is the national Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for anyone living in Australia. The service provides telephone and online crisis and trauma counselling.

 1800 737 732
 www.1800respect.org.au

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is a free, and anonymous 24/7 telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people 5–25 years old.

 1800 551 800
 www.kidshelpline.com.au



Lifeline

Lifeline is a national 24-hour support line, which provides crisis support and mental health services.

 131 114
 www.lifeline.org.au



Mensline Australia

Mensline Australia is a national 24/7 service for men, providing support, information, or referral by telephone or online.

 1300 789 978
 www.mensline.org.au



Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia offers counselling, family dispute resolution, mediation, and a range of family and community support and education programs.

 1300 364 277
 www.relationships.org.au



Suicide Call Back Service

Suicide Call Back Service offers free professional 24/7 telephone counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk, bereaved by suicide and people experiencing emotional or mental health issues.

 1300 659 467
 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

The Family Relationship Advice Line

The Family Relationship Advice Line helps families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation. It can also refer callers to local services that provide assistance.

 1800 050 321
 www.familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line

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Minister's Foreword

When someone enlists in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), their family enlists too. Military life has much to offer families, who share in the pride, opportunities and triumphs of service. However, they also face unique challenges and make many sacrifices.

For families, the posting cycle means they are regularly separated from their personal and school or professional connections. This can impact education, employment and financial security, not to mention their own wellbeing.

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide stated: *'ADF members are often placed in high-risk environments, expected to live and work in physically and mentally demanding situations, and exposed to prolonged and often extreme levels of stress. This extends beyond war and combat-related deployments to include domestic and international terrorism responses, natural disaster responses, and humanitarian and international peacekeeping operations.'*

This affects not only ADF members but their families. For partners, it can mean being separated from your loved one for months on end and raising children alone. There is no doubt that the inherent strength, resilience and adaptability of Defence and veteran families contributes to our Defence capability.

The Royal Commission also recognised the pivotal role families play in supporting the wellbeing of service members and veterans. The Final Report said families are *'likely to be among the first to observe changes in their loved one's mental and emotional state. As a consequence, families are often first responders in providing mental health first aid and support. When called on to do so, they require the best resources and access to high-quality assistance.'*

The Australian Government is committed to supporting Defence and veteran families and providing them with the resources and assistance they need. Families make many sacrifices in order to support their loved ones and we owe it to them to ensure we provide services and support that are tailored to their unique needs.

This Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy has been developed by the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs in conjunction with family members, many of whom have generously shared their own lived experience.

This Strategy will guide how the Australian Government provides support to families of current and former ADF members over the next five years and evolve as the Government responds to the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

I thank the individuals and organisations from across the Defence and veteran family sector who have provided valuable input into this Strategy and the First Action Plan. I also acknowledge the important contributions of the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner and Defence Families of Australia, who have ensured the voices of Defence and veteran families are heard.

I look forward to working with you all on the priorities set out in this Strategy so together we can better support the wellbeing of Defence and veteran families and enable them to thrive during and after Defence service.



Matt Keogh

The Honourable Matt Keogh MP
Minister for Defence Personnel
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Acknowledgments

The Department of Defence (Defence) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) humbly acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this Strategy was developed and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia and their continuing spiritual and cultural connection to land, sea and community. Together we acknowledge the many First Nations people who have served in the Australian Defence Force and their families.

Defence and DVA gratefully acknowledge the people from Defence, veteran and family communities, organisations and Australian Government agencies who contributed to the development of this Strategy. In particular, Defence and DVA would like to acknowledge the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner and Defence Families of Australia for their tireless dedication and ongoing commitment to bringing the voices of Defence and veteran families to the forefront of this Strategy.

Defence and DVA also extend our sincere gratitude to the participants of the Veteran Families' Policy Forum and those partners within Defence who provided their time and expertise to review this Strategy prior to publication.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide began on 8 July 2021 and delivered its Final Report on 9 September 2024. The Final Report marked the culmination of the most significant and comprehensive inquiry conducted into suicide and suicidality in the Defence and veteran communities to date.

The death by suicide of any ADF member or veteran is a tragedy and deeply felt by their families, the ADF, the veteran community and the wider community.

Families play a critical role in supporting serving and ex-serving members at risk of suicide and were instrumental in advocating for the establishment of this Royal Commission. To those serving and ex-serving members, their families and advocates, who have bravely and selflessly shared their lived experience with the Royal Commission over the past 3 years—we extend our deepest gratitude.

Defence and DVA acknowledge there have been systemic failings in adequately supporting Defence and veteran families. In response to the Royal Commission Final Report, Government deliberated on the recommendations and provided a whole-of-Government response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. As a result, this Strategy and First Action Plan, and any subsequent action plans, will be intentionally responsive to the Royal Commission recommendations. Defence and DVA will continue to make amendments to the Action Plan as actions progress and will routinely update versions on the Defence and DVA website.

“Family support is recognised as critical to the wellbeing of serving and ex-serving members; it can protect against the risk of suicide and suicidality.”

Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (2024), Vol 6, para 343.

“As recognised in the Dunt Review members families and close friends are likely to be among the first to observe changes in their loved one’s mental and emotional state. As a consequence, families are often first responders in providing mental health first aid and support. When called on to do so, they require the best resources and access to high-quality assistance...”

Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (2024), Vol 6, para 126.

Strategy at a glance

Vision

Defence and veteran families thrive during and after Defence service.

Wellbeing Factors

This diagram represents the wellbeing factors of Defence and veteran families' lives, which underpin this Strategy. These factors are crucial in ensuring wellbeing and increasing a family's likelihood of thriving. This Strategy has been developed with a central focus on lifetime family wellbeing.



Guiding principles

1 Recognise the diversity of Defence and veteran families.

3 Consider Defence and veteran family wellbeing holistically.

2 Help Defence and veteran families make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

4 Ensure we are aware of emerging needs, by engaging directly and proactively.

Priorities



1 Informed and engaged

Defence and veteran families can find the information they need when they need it, so they can access available supports and make informed decisions.

Defence and DVA actively engage with families to ensure the perspectives of Defence and veteran families are considered, with relevant and appropriate information provided directly to families.



2 Supported and secure

Any impacts of service and related life events are managed through appropriate, flexible, fit-for-purpose policies, support and communication. This includes access to appropriate housing solutions and improved locational certainty for families of current serving members. It also includes support for veteran families during and after transition.



3 Recognised and understood

The impacts of military life on Defence and veteran families are recognised alongside the pivotal role families play in supporting the wellbeing of service members and veterans.

Continue understanding Defence and veteran families through engagement, research, and evaluation to improve the supports available to families and enhance the policies of Defence and DVA that impact on families.

Defence and veteran families are considered as a discrete and unique cohort. Policies or decisions that impact families include consideration of Defence and veteran family circumstances.

SECTION 1

Introduction



Able Seaman Combat Systems Operations
Kate Bowerman catches up with her family as
HMAS *Warramunga* has a three day stop over
at Hobart, Tasmania.

Introduction

The purpose of this Strategy

The objective of the *Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy* (this Strategy) is to guide the support provided to Defence and veteran families by the Department of Defence (Defence) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) over the next 5 years. It is also intended to guide how both departments develop policies and approaches that affect families.

This Strategy outlines the vision and strategic priorities for the supports Defence and DVA provide to families, how family impacts are taken into account, and how we hear the voices of families. This Strategy is informed by the experiences of Defence and veteran families, through Defence and veteran family feedback, surveys, and research findings.

While various aspects of family wellbeing are detailed in this Strategy, one of the key reasons for developing this Strategy is the acknowledgement that Australian Defence Force (ADF) service leads to both opportunities and challenges for families. Families may need supports relating to any or all of the aspects of wellbeing, depending on their circumstances, and the ADF needs to be conscious of how the way it operates affects families.

We know that good family wellbeing is different for each family. We also know that cooperation and a sense of shared responsibility between individuals, communities, providers, and all levels of government will give Defence and veteran families the best chance of long-term wellbeing and help them thrive.

The wellbeing of families is essential for the success of the Defence workforce. Family wellbeing also supports a healthy and happy veteran community. Lifetime wellbeing for families must be supported by a focus on early intervention, on maximising Defence and veteran families' autonomy, and social participation.

Many new initiatives that support family wellbeing are already underway. For example, as of 1 July 2023, Defence has put in place new categorisation and location frameworks which recognise contemporary family structures and provide additional benefits to members and families. On the veteran family side, the start of the Acute Support Package from 14 October 2022 and its expansion from 1 July 2023 means that more veteran families in need of support because of new and challenging life circumstances are able to get it.

This Strategy is part of a suite of strategies that collectively guide our collaborative approach to wellbeing for our people, including current serving members, veterans and families. This includes:

- the *Veteran Transition Strategy* – a joint Strategy by Defence, DVA and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation, published in 2023, and its Action Plan released in November 2024
- the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*, which is expected to be finalised in 2025
- the *Defence Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence 2023–2028* and the *DVA Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2020–2025*
- the *DVA Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy*, which embodies DVA's commitment to open, genuine and meaningful engagement.

Who is this Strategy for?

This Strategy aims to benefit all families of those who serve or who have served in the ADF as well as current serving members and veterans within those families.

What is a Defence or veteran family?

The term 'family' means different things to different people. The definition of family and identification of people who a person considers to be their family is unique and personal.

A family may include immediate family relationships, single parent families, grandparents and grandcarers, extended family, Indigenous kinship relationships, personal relationships, close friendships and carers. Bereaved family members remain veteran families for life. Pets are also an important part of many households with many considering their pets to be family members.

Certain supports are available only to the partners and children of members, and legislation defines 'family' more strictly for the purpose of many ADF member and DVA veteran benefits.

This Strategy recognises that while these limitations exist, people outside of the traditional definition of 'family' need consideration too. A future system of support needs to be flexible enough to respond to the needs of all families.

The words 'family' and 'families' are used throughout this Strategy to refer to Defence and veteran families in all their diversity, including the members and veterans themselves.

How we engaged with families to build this Strategy

Engagement to guide the development of this Strategy included:

- the online Defence and Veteran Family Support Strategy engagement survey through the DVA website, which received more than 1,900 responses
- forums led by the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner
- workshops with the DVA Women Veterans Forum and Veterans' Families Policy Forum
- discussions with ex-service organisations (ESOs) through DVA's ESO Round Table and the Young Veterans Forum
- engagements by Defence Families of Australia
- Defence family consultations with current and ex-serving member families
- review of existing survey results, including the 2022 ADF Family Survey and the Defence Census
- engagement with state and territory veterans' affairs agencies
- workshops with frontline DVA staff.

Anonymised historical data from several sources was also used, including the 24/7 Defence Member and Family Helpline intakes, feedback from interviews, forums, webinars, social media posts, and workshops with members of the veteran family community.

The vision for families

Our vision for Defence and veteran families is:

Defence and veteran families thrive

during and after Defence service.

What does it mean to thrive?

When a family is thriving, it means they are doing well and are in a healthy state. In the simplest terms, what underpins it is feeling good about life. This also involves knowledge and understanding and involves wellbeing in multiple areas: physical, emotional, social, and psychological.

The wellbeing factors that underpin this Strategy increase a Defence and veteran family's likelihood of thriving. When a family is thriving, they are generally happier, more productive, goal oriented, and resilient.

The importance of families

Defence and DVA recognise the pivotal role of families in supporting the health and wellbeing of service members and veterans. Families play a critical role in supporting help-seeking behaviour, providing hope, promoting social connection and support a sense of personal agency.

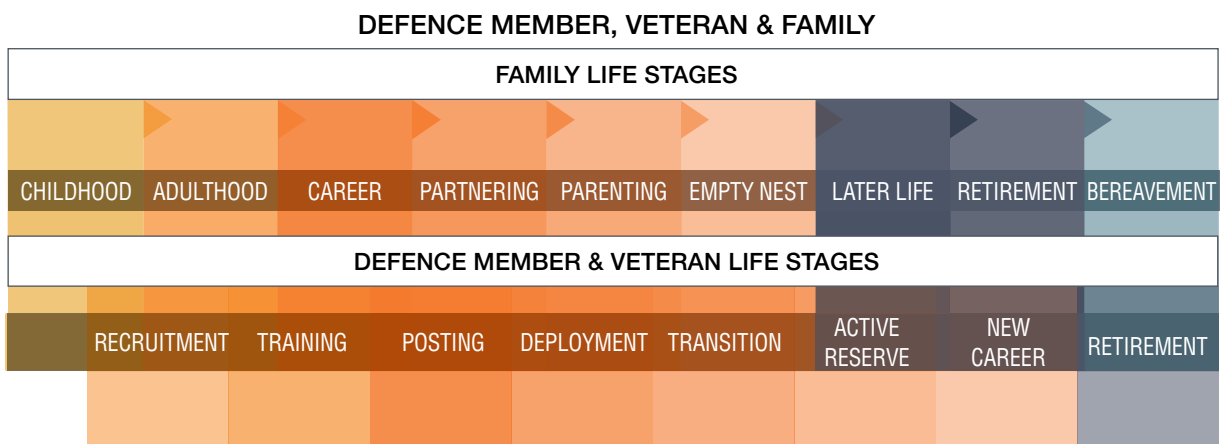
Families can help enable a member to deliver capability for Defence by providing a support system for the serving member in their career and after. Conversely, families that are struggling reduce the capability of a Defence member to perform their essential role and can be detrimental to veteran wellbeing. Military life offers both opportunities and challenges, and these can vary at different stages in a family's life stage, a member's career and their service category. Families are impacted by military service, and by absence or illness of members and veterans.

Defence and veteran families go through many life stages, both during and after their member's service. These life stages may not be linear. From a member's recruitment to transitioning from the ADF, families must adapt to new challenges at each stage of military life. These challenges can include relocations, absences, injury, separation, transfer, or re-enlistment. Also, families must adjust to different stages of family life, including births, schooling, health problems, retirement, and bereavements.

Each family has its own journey. Each major life stage requires adjustments. Additional family challenges can include mental health issues, financial stressors, or children with disabilities.

Diagram 1 (on page 11) shows how the life stages of Defence service, life as a veteran and families overlap. It is understood that families will go through these stages at different times, with the order being different than that shown in the diagram for many families. Each family is unique, and not all families will experience all of the stages outlined in the diagram.

Diagram 1: Defence service, veteran and family life stages*



* Deployment as detailed above refers to personnel deploying on operational and/or exercise activities (including those deploying as part of a formed body).

Transition from the ADF can be difficult and the experiences of families can influence whether a member stays in the ADF. Alongside the support a family provides a member during transition, families can face their own challenges during this adjustment period. Life after service, too, varies greatly for each family. Defence and veteran families make a significant contribution to the Australian community, and it is in Australia's best interests that Defence and veteran families are healthy and well.

Who advocates for families?

Many organisations and individuals advocate on behalf of the Defence and veteran family community. However, the Defence Family Advocate and Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner undertake a critical role representing the perspectives of Defence and veteran families to improve their quality of life by making recommendations and influencing policy that directly affects families.

Advocates also provide a means through which ADF members, veterans and families can raise issues affecting them both individually or collectively, and to connect families with the right person or organisation to assist them.

The Defence Family Advocate and Defence Families of Australia staff report to the Chief of the Defence Force and Minister for Defence Personnel. The Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner is a commissioner of both the Repatriation Commission and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.



Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner Gwen Cherne addresses participants at the Veteran Families Policy Forum, in Brisbane (12 March 2024)

Defence and veteran families navigate Defence and DVA family supports, as well as those offered by other Australian Government agencies, state and territory governments, local governments, community organisations, businesses and ESOs. In navigating these supports, families have told us where their wellbeing is not optimally supported. In the development of this Strategy, families have told Defence and DVA about gaps in supports, where existing supports could be improved, where agencies need to better work together to deliver what they need, and which policies need adjusting.

Finally, families also identified that the supports that do exist can be difficult to navigate, highlighting the need to provide clear and relevant information on how to access available supports.



Mr Laurie Wallace, CSM, Formation Safety Officer for Headquarters 6th Brigade, walking his family dogs Patch and Zelda around their north Brisbane suburb.

SECTION 2

Understanding wellbeing and family support



Australian Defence Force personnel and their families receive their Luna Park wrist bands during the Defence Member and Family Support Branch Greater Sydney Welcome Expo.

Understanding wellbeing and family support

Factors of wellbeing

The wellbeing framework represented in Diagram 2 (below), illustrates the central aspects of the lives of Defence and veteran families, which are crucial in shaping their wellbeing outcomes. This framework showcases the shared approach of Defence and DVA in enhancing lifetime family wellbeing and helping families to thrive. The wellbeing factors derive from academic and social research and emphasise that wellbeing is multifaceted, depends on the individual, their family and their community, and evolves over a lifetime. In order to thrive, not all of these factors are required, but a combination of some factors can impact a family's ability to thrive.

The framework also aligns with Defence and DVA wellbeing factors and is used in the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*, which is expected to be finalised in 2025.

Wellbeing as a concept comprises various factors that affect one's quality of life. Although some of these are universal (for example, health, recognition and respect, income, finance and housing), wellbeing is inherently complex and subjective. It varies according to personal attitudes, experiences, life events, and the availability of resources and support. This Strategy is crafted with a central focus on family wellbeing.

Diagram 2: Defence and veteran wellbeing factors



All families are different. While some families may share similar experiences, their wellbeing needs and outcomes will vary. Defence and veteran families have individual factors that are the same as the general population, for example, age, gender, cultural backgrounds and spiritual beliefs.

They also have factors that are unique to the Defence and veteran community, such as type or length of service, the number of and impact of operational deployments and relocations, the reason for separation from service (e.g. involuntary medical separation) and the transition experience. The latter could include the impact of service-related injury, the reduction of support from ADF members, difficulties finding work, and adjusting to civilian life. These factors can vary between military families.

These factors can be protective (for example, a sense of ADF community) or can increase risk (for example, the impact of service-related injury). Defence and DVA need to ensure these factors, and family wellbeing generally are front of mind, when developing and reviewing policies that could affect families.

In conjunction with this Strategy, the *Veteran Transition Strategy* guides Defence and DVA to best prepare and support veterans and families so they transition well and go on to live fulfilling lives.

Family wellbeing supports

To fully support their wellbeing, families need to be able to make informed decisions about the support they need and understand the outcomes they seek. This may require different wellbeing supports at different times based on circumstance and need, for example:

- **Wellbeing promotion:** Information to families about service life, available support, workplace conditions and policies that aim to prevent events that might affect a family's wellbeing before they happen.
- **Early intervention:** Targeted support to protect wellbeing by anticipating or addressing a stressful event.
- **Life event and crisis intervention:** Proactively reaching out when wellbeing is challenged by life events during service and post-service, including tailored bereavement supports following a death in service or a death related to military service, and postvention supports after a death by suicide (see "Postvention supports" on page 16).
- **Stabilisation:** Provide supports as needed to enable a return to positive wellbeing.
- **Wellbeing Maintenance:** Implementation of effective wellbeing strategies on an ongoing basis so that well families stay well.

Postvention supports

Postvention support refers to specific activities or interventions which occur after a death by suicide to support people who are bereaved or affected by loss and grief¹.

Everyone experiences grief differently in their bereavement process. Although individual bereavement experiences vary, they share similar features and reactions. People bereaved by suicide, as with people bereaved by other types of death, experience general grief reactions such as shock, denial, sadness, confusion and anger.

Research has shown that in addition to these feelings, people bereaved by suicide may show higher levels of shame, responsibility, guilt, rejection, blame (self-and/or others), personal and public stigma and trauma.

Research also shows that postvention support, which addresses trauma, enables greater space for post-traumatic growth after grief.

Working together for family wellbeing

Supporting positive wellbeing is a shared responsibility between individuals, community, providers, and all levels of government.

Federal, state and territory, and local governments work together to provide a wide variety of supports to veteran families. The broader Australian community has also responded to the needs of Defence and veteran families with a range of non-government and ex-service organisations established to support the military community during and after service.

Our approach to mental health and wellbeing support in this Strategy complements the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*, which is expected to be finalised in 2025.

Diagram 3 (on page 17) provides examples of the breadth of formal supports provided through different agencies and non-government organisations working together for the wellbeing of Defence and veteran families.

A broad range of supports for Australian families are available in the community, but because of the unique nature of service and the geographical challenges of service, Defence and DVA work together to offer additional supports tailored specifically for Defence and veteran families.

1 Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention and Postvention Australia (2017) *Postvention Australia Guidelines: A resource for organisations and individuals providing services to people bereaved by suicide*. Brisbane: Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention.
Available: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0038/359696/Postvention_WEB.pdf

Diagram 3: Working together for family wellbeing



Coordinated support requires ongoing education of government departments, policy makers and service providers on the unique needs of Defence and veteran families. This approach means that we continue to work together and the family support Defence and DVA deliver is appropriately tailored and does not duplicate or compete with existing mainstream supports, as well as being appropriate for families across a range of circumstances.



A wreath is laid at the Shrine of Remembrance by Primrose on behalf of children who have lost a parent, during the last leg of the Legacy Centenary Torch Relay in Melbourne, 13 October 2023.

SECTION 3

Guiding Principles



Squadron Leader Lee Thompson and her family during the RAAF Base Townsville Community Open Day.

Guiding Principles

Defence and DVA will work together, with other departments, agencies and organisations, and alongside ADF members, veterans and families to support Defence and veteran families to thrive during and after Defence service in accordance with the overarching Strategy. This includes reviewing existing policies which affect families in order to strengthen family wellbeing. The following four principles will guide how Defence and DVA will operate to achieve our vision to support families to manage their wellbeing and thrive.

1.

Recognise the diversity of Defence and veteran families.

Corporal Marie Yorston reuniting with her niece Allee, and nephew Brody, after one month away as part of Operation Bushfire Assist 19–20. Corporal Yorston is Allee's sole carer.



Our engagement, support and policy development will consider the diversity of Defence and veteran family structures, not just 'nuclear' families. This includes, but is not limited to, cultural, language, religious and identity diversity, single and sole parent families, separated families, blended families, extended families, grandcarers, indigenous kinship relationships, personal relationships, close friendships and carers.

Family employment, appropriate housing, locational certainty, communication, and strong community supports are key factors that promote wellbeing for families and help them to thrive. These are key areas of focus for this Strategy.

2.

Help Defence and veteran families make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

From left to right: Captain Stephanie Costa and Corporal Britney Pascoe with their bubs in the parents room.



Defence and DVA will directly engage and communicate with ADF members, veterans and families, so that they are aware of the available avenues of support before experiencing crisis and able to find the information when they need it. This communication must be clear, concise, consistent and readily available.

Defence and DVA will directly provide information to Defence and veteran families so that their needs can be met. Defence and DVA will explore options for expanding what is available to ensure families are better supported. This includes ensuring that Defence and DVA staff are able to advise families about available supports.

Appropriate information sharing (bearing in mind privacy principles and need-to-know principles) with partner organisations will contribute to service offerings.

3.

Consider Defence and veteran family wellbeing holistically.

Defence LGBTI Information Service President, Lieutenant Rachel Cosgrove takes part in the 2023 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on Oxford Street, Sydney.



Both the supports provided, and the underpinning policies, must consider the holistic wellbeing needs of serving members, veterans and families throughout their lives, recognising impacts during service have effects after service. For example, poor mental health may impact the ability of a family member or veteran to find a job, leading to financial stress and relationship breakdown.

4.

Ensure we are aware of emerging needs, by engaging directly and proactively.

Dedication ceremony for contemporary artwork For Every Drop Shed in Anguish hosted by the Australian War Memorial (22 February 2024).



We will continue to build our understanding of Defence and veteran families to better inform and adapt our policies and supports. We will do this primarily through engagement and collaboration with families themselves. Consultation with family advocate groups and research, collection of data and insights will also aid our ongoing understanding.

Research-based solutions, as well as direct routine engagement, will help us to identify gaps, to understand families' needs, and inform the types of support offered.



Australian Defence Force veteran carries his grandson while marching through Sydney's city streets as a part of the 2022 ANZAC Day celebrations.

SECTION 4

Strategic Priorities



Australian Army soldier and Amata community member Private Kamurin Young from North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) with his son, during the opening ceremony the 2024 Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme at Amata, South Australia.

Strategic Priorities

This Strategy is informed by the experiences of Defence and veteran families, which highlighted the need for families to feel that they have more certainty and control over their lives and their families' futures. Three strategic priorities have been identified to focus the work of Defence and DVA throughout the life of this Strategy and achieve its vision. Initiatives to help families in these areas form the priorities for the action plans.

Strategic Priority One: Informed and Engaged



Kate O'Donoghue from Open Arms, Veterans and Families Counselling meet with Lita and her children Calvin and Lola.

Consultation and research findings

Families have told Defence and DVA they often don't know what supports are available to them or how to access them. Families said they want to be able to quickly and easily work out what is available, in order to access what they need, especially if the family may be struggling or experiencing crisis. This includes being able to access supports after hours. Families further explained the support available to them is not always joined up, leaving gaps and sometimes creating duplication.

Families also said they often act as each other's support networks and share information amongst themselves about available supports.

- Navigating the systems of support and understanding Defence and DVA are a key barrier to enhanced family wellbeing. Families have said they know there is a range of support available from Defence, DVA, ex-service organisations, non-government organisations and others, but had trouble finding what was relevant to them in their circumstances.
- Families reported that while relevant information may be provided or is visible to the Defence member or veteran, it is often not passed on to families. Families suggested making a staff member available to family members to answer questions, not just a website or online resources.

- Families said they feel unseen and unheard when Defence and DVA only engage with the member on matters that relate to the whole family. Families said they would feel better supported if Defence and DVA clearly, concisely and consistently communicated with them directly as well as the member about matters that affect their family.
- Families said they would like Defence and DVA to strengthen partnerships with the community and carers of veterans, so that their experiences and expertise influence policy and that supports are designed with them, not just for them.

What we will do

- Address barriers to communications with families wherever possible.
-
- Review and update communications, including communications that are tailored for both the desired audience and for the various stages of the Defence and veteran lifecycle.
-
- Ensure service providers understand the unique experiences and circumstances of Defence and veteran families, so they can provide culturally appropriate supports.
-
- Explore ways to help build further capacity and expertise in the ex-service community to better meet the needs of veteran families.
-

What does success look like?

- Publicly accessible information is readily available to help families prepare for significant events in advance, where practicable.
- Information and supports provided by government and non-government service providers are appropriate to families' needs, reflect their diverse backgrounds, and recognise the unique nature of military service.
- Families are aware of and know how to access relevant and targeted information during and after military service and know where to get support if they need it.
- Defence and DVA provide relevant and appropriate information and support directly to families.
- Families' circumstances are taken into consideration in unit and Individual Welfare Boards where appropriate.
- Families' lived experiences are captured in DVA's Lived Experience Framework to influence supports and policies.

Strategic Priority Two: Supported and Secure



Seaman Electronic Warfare
Harrison Aggar with his
family onboard HMAS
Arunta during a family day
on Sydney Harbour.
(L-R) Shannon Plee,
Benjamin Aggar, Louise
Aggar, Harrison Aggar,
Eliza Aggar and
Mitchell Aggar.

Consultation and research findings

Transition, member absences, operational deployments, relocation, geographical disadvantage and the long-term effects of service on partners and children are identified as key issues for families.

Families explained they want to remain connected and be supported to navigate transition. The *Veteran Transition Strategy* sits alongside this Strategy, with the aim of ensuring positive transition experiences for all families.

Proactive mental health education and access to information helps families to maintain their mental health and navigate the impact of mental ill health, if it should occur. Families want to engage with available free mental health first aid training so they can support family members. This benefits families and the wider community, as well as potentially enhancing employment prospects for family members.

While supports exist to assist families during service-related absences, the absence of a member during service, especially in families with children, can take a toll. The particular requirements of families with special needs should be considered in policy and program design.

Access to housing that meets families' needs is a primary challenge for both Defence and veteran families which has been raised throughout engagements, surveys and research. This extends to the difficulty in finding rental properties that will support pets.

Families would like Defence and DVA to work better together throughout transition to address problems that Defence and veteran families may face, including intergenerational impacts of service.

This includes considering the family impact of the posting cycle and the need for locational certainty on families.

What we will do

- Deliver and evaluate the expanded Acute Support Package to meet differing family requirements.

- Continue work to enhance the transition experience for members and families, aligned to the *Veteran Transition Strategy* and its Action Plan.

- Review current policies and supports to enhance the education and wellbeing outcomes for children of Defence and veteran families.

- Review current supports and work with employers and agencies to better enable family employment and pathways into employment, including childcare access.

- Continue to support Defence and veteran families to buy their own homes.

- Enhance member choice and flexibility with the provision of Defence housing.

- Provide funding for more crisis and transitional housing, and for specialist supports for veterans and their families who are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.

- Review appropriateness of posting cycles and their duration by taking into account family stability, the development of the member's skills and capability, and examine ways to provide greater posting lead times and locational certainty for families.

- Improve the way Defence and DVA supports bereaved families including postvention supports after a death by suicide.

- Ensure the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030*, which is expected to be finalised in 2025, takes into account the needs of families.

What does success look like?

- Support is available when families need it, including after hours.
- Flexible supports are available to help all families including those with special needs, single parents, sole parents, people with co-parenting arrangements, people with other caring responsibilities, child-free families, and people with pets.
- Children are supported to engage in school and in the community.
- Family members are supported through educational supports and career counselling to pursue career choices.
- Families have access to safe, secure and suitable housing options during ADF service.
- Defence members and families are aware of all support available to them during and post-service, including Rent Assistance.
- Flexible supports are available to help mitigate the impact of significant events on families.
- Families are supported to access childcare.
- Families are assisted in maintaining locational certainty so far as operationally possible.

- Defence and DVA policies are designed to support the diversity of family structures and carer arrangements, minimising negative impacts on them, including when assigning postings.
- Families have access to tailored mental health education, mental health first aid and supports.
- Families continue to be provided with support through a fit-for-purpose Open Arms—Veterans and Families Counselling.
- Families have opportunities to remain connected to the military community throughout their lives wherever they choose to settle post-service.
- Families have opportunities to engage in their community and build support networks.
- Family members are supported to be appropriately employed.

Strategic Priority Three: Recognised and Understood



Australian Defence Force personnel and their families at the 2024 Welcome to Cerberus community event held at Pelican Park Recreation Centre in Hastings, Melbourne, VIC.

Consultation and research findings

- Families have told Defence and DVA that the impact of military service on families is not recognised and that families play a critical role the veteran support system.
- Families want Defence and DVA to continue to understand the changing needs of families and assist them by developing or changing supports to meet those needs. Families said they want Defence and DVA to be agile in meeting the unique circumstances of every family.
- Families explained they want to be included in and influence the design of programs and implementation. Reviews of the support provided to Defence and veteran families have identified the need for regular evolution and evaluation of policies and supports to assess whether they are achieving their intended outcomes and not producing unintended consequences.
- For many, 'family' means more than a partner and children. First Nations families, parents of veterans, ex-partners of veterans, carers, grandcarers, LGBTQIA+ families, and culturally and linguistically diverse families have reported feeling excluded from important discussions or less supported by Defence, DVA and other organisations.

What we will do

- Develop a program of commemorations that celebrates and recognises Defence and veteran families.

- Use the expertise of Defence Member and Family Support, Defence Families of Australia, the Veteran Family Advocate, the Defence Family Advocate, and the DVA consultation framework for broad engagement.

- Continue to facilitate forums to consult veteran families through the DVA Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

- Establish Defence Families of Australia family forums.

- Collaborate more effectively with academia on family studies.

- Institute better data collection practices.

- Continue to engage with families on their lived experience to help inform service delivery.

- Supporting Defence Families of Australia to be a fit for purpose advisory body that advocates on issues affecting ADF families.

What does success look like?

- Importance of Defence and veteran families is publicly recognised.
- Defence and DVA engage with families, including through the Defence Family Advocate and Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, to ensure the perspectives of Defence and veteran families are considered.
- A joint Defence and DVA strategic research agenda with research outcomes that span the service cycle of veterans and families to identify priorities.
- Defence and DVA engage families to participate and share their experiences, to ensure their voices are heard and considered in system improvements and policy reform.
- Policies and supports are reviewed or evaluated and updated to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are achieving their stated outcomes, consistent with the vision of this Strategy.
- Policies and supports are continually improved following better data collection.



Flight Lieutenant Jeffrey Pedrina (retd), centre, and his family members check out a de Havilland DHC-4 Caribou, the aircraft type he flew during the Vietnam War.
Photo: Flight lieutenant Karyn 39348 Markwell.

SECTION 5

How will we
demonstrate progress



Engineering Officer Lieutenant Sherwin Saldanha with his daughter during HMAS *Hobart*'s Family Day, Fleet Base East, New South Wales.

How will we demonstrate progress

Action plans

Defence and DVA have developed the First Action Plan which describes specific initiatives that act on the principles and priorities identified in this Strategy. It is through this action plan that the Strategy's vision will be achieved. Further action plans may be developed with the Defence Families Advocate and Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner over time and published.

Monitoring and review

Defence and DVA are working with the Australian Institute of Family Studies to develop a framework to monitor the success of family wellbeing supports and the strategic priorities within this document. This framework will be publicly released shortly after this Strategy to demonstrate our commitment to tracking implementation progress and outcomes, and to support accountability. The framework will outline how progress will be reported back to families, stakeholders, and the public.

This framework will also allow us to review and consider changes to policies to ensure they continue to meet wellbeing needs. Defence Member and Family Support and DVA family support service providers will provide insight to inform these evaluation activities. They will be able to inform and act on outcomes and agreed improvements within their respective scope and mandated responsibilities.

The progress of the implementation of this Strategy, including subsequent action plans, will be overseen by the Defence/DVA Links Steering Committee (DLSC), a high-level Defence and DVA committee, co-chaired by Defence and DVA. The Defence Family Advocate and the Veteran Family Advocate will be consulted prior to relevant reporting being submitted to the DLSC, in their role as advocates for the Defence and veteran family. The role of the DLSC is to implement the strategic direction set by Defence and DVA executives and ensure that veterans and families are cared for and supported in the most effective manner. DLSC meetings ensure collaboration across a range of initiatives.

Defence and DVA will also report to the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Minister for Defence Personnel on the progress of implementation.



Lieutenant Commander Leigh George from HMAS *Warramunga* embraces his family on the wharf of Fleet Base East, Sydney, New South Wales on return from a successful deployment.

First Action Plan

Under this Strategy, Defence and DVA have established this first Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Action Plan (First Action Plan) to set out the actions Defence and DVA will initially take to achieve the objectives of this Strategy.

The objective of this Strategy is to guide the support provided to Defence and veteran families by Defence and DVA over the next 5 years.

This Strategy is for the benefit of all families of those who serve or who have served in the ADF, as well as the members and veterans within those families. This First Action Plan sets out the initial key actions that will be undertaken by Defence and DVA to strengthen information, supports, and pathways, as well as collaboration between programs and services, all of which contribute to the wellbeing of families and help them thrive across and between life stages.

Objectives of this First Action Plan

This First Action Plan is designed to drive progress under the priorities of this Strategy: Informed and Engaged; Supported and Secure; and Recognised and Understood, by identifying and committing to key actions under each of the objectives of this Strategy. The objectives aim to ensure Defence and veteran families attain the highest possible wellbeing outcomes throughout their lives.

This Strategy recognises in order for families to thrive, their unique circumstances must be understood and their needs considered through the policies or decisions that impact them. Our coordinated approach, supported by links with local communities, peer networks and organisations supporting Defence and veteran communities, ensures that the impacts of service and related life events are managed, both during and after service, with appropriate fit for purpose policies, programs and support.

Monitoring and evaluation

A framework is being developed to guide the monitoring and evaluation of this Strategy and action plans and will be used to report back to families, stakeholders, and the public on the outcomes.

Once finalised, the framework will be publicly released to demonstrate the commitment to track implementation progress and outcomes and support accountability. The framework will support the development of future action plans over the course of the 5 year strategy, so that new priorities can be identified, and actions can be adjusted, as needed.

A high-level progress report on the implementation of action plans will be developed and published, alongside other aligned strategy reporting, including the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*, which is expected to be finalised in 2025, and the *Veteran Transition Strategy*.

Priority One: Informed and Engaged

Families can find the information they need when they need it, so they can access available supports and make informed decisions. Defence and DVA actively engage with families to ensure the perspectives of Defence and veteran families are considered, with relevant and appropriate information provided directly to families.

Objective 1.1: Publicly accessible information is readily available to help families prepare for significant events in advance, where practicable.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.1.1 Provide accessible, up-to-date and accurate information about Defence and DVA payments and services, other government agencies and wider community supports, including mainstream supports, available to families. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) (ii) and (v), (b) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence and DVA
1.1.2 Review and update communications regularly, including tailored communications for various stages of military and post service life, and where there are changes to policies and programs. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) (ii) and (v), (b) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence and DVA
1.1.3 Develop Life Event Guides that reflect the needs and language of veterans and families during specific life events and personal situations.	Defence and DVA
1.1.4 Deliver a psychoeducational package of webinar and website content aimed to assist Defence families to plan proactively and seek help when unanticipated events arise. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) (iii) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
1.1.5 Update the Defence Member and Family Information Guide and proactively provide it to ADF members and families to increase support service awareness.	Defence

Objective 1.2: Defence and DVA will work with government and non-government service providers to ensure information and supports they provide is appropriate to families' needs, reflects their diverse background, and recognises the unique nature of military service.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.2.1 Expand delivery of the ADF Aware program to education providers to improve awareness of the unique challenges faced by ADF families.	Defence
1.2.2 Strengthen engagement with non-government organisations, community service organisations, and other government departments to ensure the support provided is representative of the unique needs and challenges faced by ADF families.	Defence
1.2.3 Review the suite of family support programs and initiatives available to Defence families, to ensure they are informed by evidence and engagement with members, families and Advocates. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
1.2.4 Navy, Army and Air Force routinely provide actions, communications and initiatives to support the families of their members, including locally run family inclusive events.	Defence
1.2.5 Promote existing education and training to the Department of Social Services, Department of Health and Aged Care, State and Territory Governments, contracted providers, advocates, and the broader provider networks about the needs of veteran families. This includes Defence Health, the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP), Open Arms online webinars and DVA's Health Providers Partnership Forum.	DVA
1.2.6 Develop an Open Arms Families and Young People's Pathway to expand support options for young people aged 12 to 25.	DVA
1.2.7 Partner across State, Territory and Commonwealth health organisations to enhance access to mental health services for veterans and families and to establish referrals pathways to DVA, including Open Arms.	DVA
1.2.8 Promote existing veteran family cultural competency training modules for professionals working with veteran families. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 73 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	DVA

Objective 1.3: Families are aware of and know how to access relevant and targeted information during and after military service and understand where to go for support if they are experiencing challenges.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.3.1 Work with the Joint Transition Authority (JTA) to increase family attendance at Transition Seminars.	Defence
1.3.2 Deliver a centralised Defence family portal, to simplify and improve ADF family accessibility to targeted service and support information including direct notifications to registered families. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (b) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
1.3.3 Encourage all staff within DVA to undertake mental health first aid, domestic and family violence awareness and trauma informed practice training.	DVA
1.3.4 Implement the DVA Website Enhancement Project to ensure DVA's primary online communication channel reflects the needs of veterans, veteran families, and the wider veteran community.	DVA
1.3.5 Review communication on the Acute Support Package to improve awareness and access for eligible families.	DVA

Objective 1.4: DVA and Defence actively engage with families, including through the Defence Family Advocate and Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, to ensure the perspectives of Defence and veteran families are considered.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.4.1 Consult with Defence Families of Australia (DFA) on the views of ADF families and engage at regular intervals on program needs analysis and design of family focused interventions. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
1.4.2 Support the work of Defence Family Advocate, DFA delegates, and other Defence peer support and advocacy groups in promoting family engagement across all levels of government. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
1.4.3 Partner with the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner to better understand the experiences of families and the impacts of service on them. Analyse and synthesise outcomes of family engagements to find systemic issues that require action. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 104 (b) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	DVA

Objective 1.5: Defence and DVA to actively provide relevant and appropriate information and support directly to families.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.5.1 Veterans' and Families' Hubs and Defence Member and Family Support (DMFS) will provide information and connect families to more of the relevant supports in their community.	Defence and DVA
1.5.2 Enhancing communication directly with families to provide information on available services and supports. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (b) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence and DVA
1.5.3 Evaluate existing resources available to client facing staff which facilitate families connecting with other government, non-government and community services, and community mental health services and supports.	DVA
1.5.4 Improve the timeliness of information and enhance the transition experience for members and families, informed by the <i>Veteran Transition Strategy</i> and its Action Plan.	DVA

Objective 1.6: Support is available when families need it, including after hours.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.6.1 Deliver a training package designed to assist Defence and DVA staff to better understand service impact on families.	Defence and DVA
1.6.2 Measure outcomes of direct practice through the commencement of a goal attainment scaling trial for DMFS Social Workers.	Defence

Objective 1.7: Families' circumstances are taken into consideration in unit and Individual Welfare Board (IWB) meetings as appropriate.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.7.1 Review unit and Individual Welfare Board practice in regard to increasing family engagement ensuring family circumstances are taken into consideration within decision making processes.	Defence
1.7.2 Establish mechanisms to enable authorised full-time family member carers (who have been granted consent by member) the means to participate in discussions with Defence concerning the member.	Defence

Objective 1.8: Families' lived experiences are captured in DVA's lived experience framework in order to influence supports and policies.

Actions	Responsible Agency
1.8.1 Integrate the lived experience framework into the design and implementation of DVA policies and programs that effect families.	DVA

Priority Two: Supported and Secure

Any impacts of service and related life events are managed, through appropriate and flexible, fit for purpose policies, support, and communication. This includes access to appropriate housing solutions and improved locational certainty for families of current serving members. It also includes support for veteran families during and after service and post transition for veteran families.

Objective 2.1: Flexible supports are available to help families with special needs, single parents, sole parents, people with co-parenting arrangements, people with other caring responsibilities, and people with pets.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.1.1 Work with the Families of the Defence Special Needs Support Group (DSNSG) and disability advocates/experts to identify opportunities to better support families with special needs.	Defence
2.1.2 Raise awareness amongst Defence families of family financial education and assistance, including the ADF Financial Services Consumer Centre.	Defence

Objective 2.2: Children are supported to engage in school and in the community.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.2.1 Review current policies and supports to enhance the educational and wellbeing outcomes for children of Defence and veteran families.	Defence and DVA
2.2.2 Continue to support the Family Support Funding Program (FSFP) grants program to focus on connection to both civilian and defence community, enabling Defence families, including children, to develop support networks, meaningfully engage with others and embed themselves in new posting locations quicker and easier.	Defence

Objective 2.3: Family members are supported through educational supports and career counselling to pursue career choices.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.3.1 Review communications on education schemes to improve awareness of eligibility requirements and support provided for eligible families.	Defence and DVA
2.3.2 Enhance access to the Partner Employee Assistance Program (PEAP) by expanding eligible items to include services such as professional networking events or subscriptions, career coaching and advice.	Defence
2.3.3 Work with Australian, state and territory governments to investigate and improve arrangements for facilitating employment opportunities for partners of Defence members as well as opportunities for remote working, or preferential employment of this cohort in appropriate roles. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (d) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
2.3.4 Provide resources to educate employers, veterans and families about the skills and value that veteran families can bring to their organisations. Recognise, celebrate and promote partner achievements in civilian employment.	DVA

Objective 2.4: Families have access to safe, secure and suitable housing options during ADF service.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.4.1 Continue to support Defence families to achieve home ownership.	Defence
2.4.2 Enhance member housing choice and flexibility to account for diverse needs and preferences, noting the particular needs of special needs families beyond the standard housing entitlements.	Defence

Objective 2.5: Defence members and families are aware of all housing support available to them during and post-service, including Rent Assistance.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.5.1 Deliver a communications campaign to raise awareness for housing entitlements for families including Rent Assistance, for Commonwealth funded removals and Defence Rent Allowance for private rental property relocations.	Defence
2.5.2 Partner with the Community Housing Industry Association to develop factsheets and training materials to better equip community housing providers to consider the unique life experience and challenges that veterans and veteran families face.	DVA
2.5.3 Deliver funding for construction of crisis and transitional accommodation and delivery of specialist supports for veterans and families who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.	DVA
2.5.4 Continue to educate DVA social workers in referrals for housing pathways for families at risk of crisis.	DVA

Objective 2.6: Flexible supports are available to help mitigate the impact of significant events on families.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.6.1 Implement the <i>Defence Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence 2023–2028</i> and associated action plans. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 102 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
2.6.2 Develop the capability to undertake cost/benefit analysis of early interventions to support families.	DVA
2.6.3 Improve the timeliness of information and enhance the transition experience for members and families, informed by the <i>Veteran Transition Strategy</i> .	DVA
2.6.4 Develop a Suicide Postvention Framework to improve responses to, and support for, veterans and families impacted by a death by suicide.	DVA
2.6.5 Evaluate the outcomes of the <i>DVA Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2020–2025</i> . Use findings to develop a new strategy for 2026 and beyond.	DVA
2.6.6 Continued review and evaluation of the Open Arms Model of Care to provide a tailored service offering, aiming to support the current and emerging mental health needs of veterans and their families.	DVA

Objective 2.7: Families are supported to access education and childcare.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.7.1 Work with Australian government to identify and realise opportunities to improve the provision of childcare services to Defence members. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (e) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
2.7.2 Work with state and territory governments to ensure that children of Defence personnel can enrol in educational institutions without having a fixed address as a result of Defence-required relocations of the family. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 4 (d) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence

Objective 2.8: Families are assisted in maintaining locational certainty so far as operationally possible.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.8.1 Review posting cycle frequency and duration and examine ways to provide early notification of posting lead times and locational certainty to improve family stability. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 4 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence

Objective 2.9: Defence and DVA policies are designed to support the diversity of family structures and minimising negative impacts on them, including when assigning postings.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.9.1 Review specific impacts on and supports for families with separated parents who are both serving members, including appropriateness of travel, housing, and allowance entitlements.	Defence
2.9.2 / 3.2.7 Develop a framework to support inclusion of family considerations in policy, program, service design and decision-making.	DVA

Objective 2.10: Families have access to tailored mental health education, mental health first aid and supports.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.10.1 Develop and publish help-seeking resources such as webinar content, written materials and video clips to assist families managing mental health challenges through a joint project with Phoenix Australia. Promote the access of the resources through communication channels targeted at families, and medical, mental health and frontline staff.	Defence
2.10.2 Support online mindfulness programs for families.	DVA
2.10.3 Enhance access to Mental Health Services for veterans and families through Open Arms, to help veterans and families reflect upon how they react to stress and assist them to develop practical skills to reduce the impact of stressful situations.	DVA
2.10.4 Develop a co-designed, evidence based, military aware, trauma informed couple relationship education program.	DVA
2.10.5 Continue to promote mental health first aid, safe talk, and other mental health education programs for families.	DVA

Objective 2.11: The needs of families are recognised in the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.11.1 Implement the final <i>Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030</i> and Action Plan, which is expected to be finalised in 2025, to ensure mental health support for families.	Defence and DVA

Objective 2.12: Families continue to be provided with support through Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.12.1 Improve communication to promote greater access to of family therapy, and services that support partners and children of Defence members. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) (iv) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence and DVA
2.12.2 Continued support for veteran families through Open Arms including, monitoring and evaluation of services to ensure the needs of veterans and their families are met, and emerging needs are forecasted.	DVA
2.12.2 Continued support for Open Arms telehealth services for families in all areas, ensuring those in rural and remote areas have access to mental health supports.	DVA

Objective 2.13: Families have opportunities to remain connected to the military community throughout their lives. Families have opportunities to engage in community and build support networks.

Actions	Responsible Agency
2.13.1 Continue to collaborate with Ex-Service Organisations in facilitating and supporting events and activities for the Defence and Veteran family community.	Defence and DVA
2.13.2 Support families to connect with local communities and each other by promoting DMFS Area Office teams, resources and activities including welcome events, workshops, newsletters and local community groups.	Defence
2.13.3 Promote the Open Arms Community and Peer Program and Veteran’s Health Week directly to families.	DVA
2.13.4 Open Arms to continue to attend Defence and community events where appropriate, to provide visibility and accessibility of Open Arms services to veterans and families.	DVA

Priority Three: Recognised and Understood

The impacts of military life on Defence and veteran families are recognised alongside the pivotal role families play in supporting the wellbeing of service members and veterans. Continue engaging with Defence and veteran families, conducting research and reviewing existing best practice material to improve Defence and DVA policies, processes and support services which address the contemporary needs of families. Policies or decisions which impact families include consideration of family circumstances.

Objective 3.1: Importance of Defence and veteran families is publicly recognised.

Actions	Responsible Agency
3.1.1 Develop a program of commemorations that celebrates and thanks veteran families, including a national Defence and Veterans' Families Day.	DVA

Objective 3.2: A joint Defence and DVA strategic research agenda to ensure research outcomes span the service and post-service lifecycle of veterans and their families to identify priorities.

Actions	Responsible Agency
3.2.1 Collaboratively develop strategic research plans that address the key issues of importance to Defence and veteran families (including intergenerational issues) and translate findings into policy and practice.	Defence and DVA
3.2.2 Continue to provide evidence regarding the functioning of military families and undertake robust empirical studies to support evidence-based policy and legislative development through the Defence Family Research Program.	Defence
3.2.3 Develop strategic partnerships through the Veterans and Families – <i>Learning and Innovation Network of Knowledge</i> (VF-LINK) program to identify strategic gaps and build capability in research and evaluation.	DVA

Objective 3.3: Defence and DVA regularly engage families to participate and share their experiences to ensure their voices are heard and considered in system improvements and policy reform.

Actions	Responsible Agency
3.3.1 Implement initiatives to improve engagement between Defence, DVA and Ex-Service Organisations to better understand the range of issues families are facing.	Defence and DVA
3.3.2 Ensure inclusion of serving, transitioning and post-service experiences in system improvements and policy reform across Defence and DVA.	Defence and DVA
3.3.3 Supporting DFA to be a fit for purpose advisory body that advocates on issues impacting ADF families. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 104 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
3.3.4 Include questions in the ADF Family Survey that align to this Strategy's three priority areas and capture ongoing engagement opportunities.	Defence
3.3.5 Implement the <i>Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy</i> to support and improve DVA's engagement with families.	DVA
3.3.6 Engage with those with caring responsibilities for a veteran family member, to better understand the needs and risks faced by this cohort, and issues they may have with current policy and design.	DVA
2.9.3 / 3.3.7 Develop a framework to support inclusion of family considerations in policy, program, service design and decision-making.	DVA
3.3.8 Review the Veteran Families Policy Forum Terms of Reference to ensure diverse family representation.	DVA

Objective 3.4: Policies and supports are regularly reviewed or evaluated and updated to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are achieving their stated outcomes.

Actions	Responsible Agency
3.4.1 Monitor and evaluate policies and programs in response to feedback from families and stakeholders.	Defence and DVA
3.4.2 Evaluate the Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package.	DVA
3.4.3 Deliver the <i>Enhance Access to Benefits and Supports for Separated Veteran Families</i> project to create a framework that improves support and access for separated veteran families.	DVA

Objective 3.5: Supports are continually improved following better data collection.

Actions	Responsible Agency
3.5.1 Enhance Defence and DVA data collection, including incorporation of internal and external data sources, to inform service delivery opportunities for improvement.	Defence and DVA
3.5.2 Systematically analyse data from the Defence Member and Family Helpline (DMFH) to better understand issues and trends, and create opportunities to better assist members and their families. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (a) (i) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence
3.5.3 Develop and implement a framework to evaluate outcomes, including the efficiency and effectiveness of all current and future DMFS initiatives, with the material to be made public to demonstrate transparency and accountability for the performance of DMFS. This action builds on the support needs identified in recommendation 103 (c) of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.	Defence

Glossary

1. Action plan

Action plans outline activities and initiatives to achieve our intended outcomes and strategic priorities.

2. Acute Support Package

The Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package is available to eligible veterans and families who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing crisis.

3. Early intervention

This term can be used in a variety of contexts. Generally, however, we mean providing tailored supports to people before a challenging life event, or as soon after a challenging life event as possible.

4. Ex-service organisations (ESOs)

An ESO is an organisation with a focus on supporting current and former ADF members and families.

There are a number of ex-service and other veteran support organisations working to support and improve the wellbeing of families. Some of these organisations reach out to family members, anticipate and advocate for their needs, and step in during times of crisis.

5. Family

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines a family as 'a group of two or more people that are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who usually live together in the same household' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 2016).

The term in the context of this Strategy refers to the people who have supported a veteran's ADF service, regardless of when their association with the veteran began, and on whom the veteran relies on to support them.

6. Lived experience

The experiences that are unique to, and that shape the wellbeing of, Defence and veteran families. These lived experiences can include being part of military and veteran culture, systems and structures that affect a person's worldview, attitudes and beliefs.

These experiences can also include trauma, experiences of distress and/or suicidality, as well as a range of social, cultural and financial determinants of health. They can also influence how a family engages with Defence and/or DVA, as well as the way the Defence and veteran family community views wellbeing and recovery.

Lived experience yields distinct knowledge that is different to knowledge gained in professional or academic contexts. This can sit alongside and complement academic or occupational expertise generated through study or work.

7. Non-government organisations (NGOs)

Not-for-profit organisations that are set up and operated independently from government but can receive government funding. NGOs provide a wide range of supports to the community, including Defence and veteran families.

8. Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling

Open Arms provides free mental health assessment and counselling to veterans of all conflicts, their families, and other members of the ADF and ex-service community.

9. Postvention

Activities or interventions occurring after a death by suicide, to support people bereaved or affected (for the purposes of this Strategy, families) to cope with stressors and manage the experience of loss and grief.

10. Separation (from the ADF)

The cessation of all forms of ADF service.

11. Transfer

An ADF member moving from the Permanent Forces to the Reserves.

12. Transition

The journey of a veteran and their family from an ADF service-centred life to a mostly civilian life.

13. Wellbeing

Wellbeing is how a person feels about themselves and their life and is a measure of a veteran or family unit's satisfaction with their life. A person with positive wellbeing generally feels good, healthy, happy, connected and has a sense of purpose.

Wellbeing can change depending on context, circumstances and stage of life. The wellbeing needs of families can change throughout the Defence and veteran family lifecycles.

14. Veteran

Veterans are now known as people who have even one day of continuous full-time service in the ADF. They include currently serving personnel. While the term 'veteran' previously described former ADF personnel who were deployed to serve in war or war-like environments, Defence and DVA have since moved to a more inclusive definition to enable broader service provision and support. For the purpose of this Strategy, we draw a distinction between ADF and veteran families.

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Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030

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