

# National Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum

Meeting of 22 November 2007

## Highlights

- The Forum considers, advises, and fosters action on mental health issues across the veteran community. Members are drawn from the principal ex-service organisations, and the Forum includes representation from Defence, DVA, VVCS, and the Australian Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health.
- Highlights of the 22 November 07 meeting were:
  - Endorsement of the ongoing work to map mental health services, identifying the geographic distribution of the veteran community and available services so that any deficiencies or trends may be identified and addressed.
  - Endorsement of the package of materials developed under the 'At Ease' campaign to better promote mental wellness in the veteran community, and provide comprehensive advice to medical and allied health professionals treating veterans. (The launch of this campaign will be early 2008.)
  - Endorsement of the information architecture and content of specific veterans mental health website available to provide ready access for veterans to be better informed on mental health issues. The Forum accepted the need to publicise its existence on this webpage, but the outcomes of Forum meetings will still be placed on the main DVA website with appropriate linkages.
  - Received an update on the 'Can Do' project providing an expansion of the program of awareness of general practitioners to the special needs of veterans and war widows.
  - Received a comprehensive and thought provoking briefing from a recently returned SAS soldier presently undergoing rehabilitation and, in doing so, identified the importance of:
    - Early recognition of mental health problems.
    - The acceptance of personal responsibility to assist in rehabilitation and recovery.
    - The support of unit members, family and health professionals.
    - Continuity of care.
    - Exploring all possible avenues for retention in service.
    - Willingness for those with personal experience to be mentors for others.
  - Recognition that the name change of the VVCS has been widely welcomed and non-Vietnam veterans and widows now appear more willing to access the service.
  - Awareness of recent developments in US practice for responding to mental health casualties arising from the Middle East conflict.
- The full Meeting Outcomes will soon be on the DVA website at <http://www.dva.gov.au/health/younger/mhealth/nvmhwhf.htm> .
- The Forum will next meet on 13 March 2008.

Bill Crews  
Forum Chair