



a message from

**Secretary
Department of Veterans' Affairs**

Liz Cosson AM, CSC



**Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs**

I am writing to you about the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) Afghanistan Inquiry (Inquiry). This is a serious and sensitive matter of which there are different levels of understanding across our veteran community. My priority, and the focus for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), is the health and wellbeing of any veteran or their family members that may be concerned about or impacted by the Inquiry or its findings.

We are working closely with the ADF and Department of Defence to ensure veterans and their families are appropriately supported by DVA and Open Arms – Veteran & Families Counselling. Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) also play a vital and complementary role to DVA by providing mateship, advocacy and welfare support.

The Inquiry began in 2016, when Army became aware of rumours and allegations of misconduct by members of the Special Operations Task Group while on operations in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016.

Defence asked for this Inquiry to understand what happened and to determine if there is any substance to the allegations. It is important to note that the Inquiry is administrative in nature and is not a criminal investigation. To ensure its integrity, the Inquiry is independent from Government and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) chain of command.

This is a necessary process to ensure the ADF upholds the highest ethical standards of behaviour, identify where there may be failings and learn lessons that may be applied for the future. The Inquiry is ongoing.

The Chief of Army in his message to Army stated that the reports 'are not reflective of who we are and what we stand for'. I would like to reassure our veteran community that the alleged actions do not detract from the dedicated service provided by those who served in the Middle East, or any other operation.

Through DVA, a range of support services are available including support for mental and physical health, rehabilitation, compensation, income support and in some cases, legal support. There are many sources of support available and if you are ever unsure what might assist you, please contact the Veteran Access Network on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 327) where a DVA staff member can talk to you about what you need and connect you to the right services or contact Open Arms – Veteran & Families Counselling on 1800 011 046.

Families, particularly children and teenagers could also be affected, and Open Arms - Veteran & Families Counselling can provide access to specialist resources to assist. Some may prefer to connect through the anonymous 'Safe Zone Support' on 1800 142 072 where Open Arms – Veteran & Families Counselling provides a specialised anonymous counselling service with an understanding of the military culture and strategies to deal with the stress of the current situation.

Depending on your unique situation, we can also look at offering a dedicated process to prioritise any DVA claims for health care or compensation and other supports. We encourage veterans and their families to reach out to us at this time and we hope you can pass on an important message that we are here to help.

Information on support services is enclosed, and can also be found on our website at:

www.dva.gov.au/igadf-afghanistan-inquiry-welfare-support-services

ADF members involved in, or impacted by, the Inquiry continue to be supported by their chain of command and have access to other assistance. Information can be found on the Defence website at:

<https://afghanistandinquiry.defence.gov.au/>

Updates on the IGADF's work are available at:

<https://defence.gov.au/mjs/reports.asp>

DVA remains committed to supporting veterans and their families whenever support is needed. Please do not hesitate to contact DVA if we can be of any assistance to you on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 327) or Open Arms – Veteran & Families Counselling on 1800 011 046 or 'Safe Zone Support' on 1800 142 072.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liz Cosson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Liz Cosson

Secretary