



The Hon Andrew Gee MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel
Federal Member for Calare

MEDIA RELEASE

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ANNUAL AIHW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR VETERAN SUPPORT

The Australian Government has today received a report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) into the rate of suicide among serving and former-serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The Report outlines that of the almost 373,500 men and women who have served over the past 36 years, tragically 1,273 have taken their own lives in the last two decades.

This report builds on previous editions by expanding the cohort analysed from those with at least one day of ADF service since 2001 to those with at least one day of service since 1985.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Andrew Gee said the report highlights the long term nature of the issue of veteran suicide and re-affirms the need for Australia to give our veterans and their families the best support possible.

"My priority is putting veterans and their families first, and making sure they are getting the services they need, when and where they need it," Minister Gee said.

"While there has been important national progress in addressing the issue of veteran suicide such as free mental health treatment for life, there is clearly much more to be done and we can't wait for the conclusion of the Royal Commission to get cracking on it.

Overhauling the claims process

"I have directed the Department of Veterans' Affairs to make the speeding up of claims processing as well as reducing the backlog a matter of utmost urgency so that we can make sure our veterans receive the necessary financial support and wrap-around services.

"To this end I have also directed that the Department overhaul the veteran claims processing system and accelerate the appointment of independent consultants to deliver a plan, and yield results within three months of their work being provided to the Australian Government.

"This work will include three-monthly milestones, and deliverables that are veteran centric and draw upon international best practice for implementation.

"It will include an examination and assessment of the claim forms and processes used to brief and engage external medical advisers and specialists.

"This will expedite the claims process and identify inhibitors so our veterans and their families can receive timely payments.

“It will also make sure that the \$98 million allocated to addressing the claims backlog in the May budget is used as effectively as possible.

Joint Transition Authority

“The transition from military to civilian life is one of the keys to addressing this issue which means the work of the Joint Transition Authority (JTA) is of critical importance and I am keen to see it fast-tracked.

“I’ve directed the Department of Defence to provide me with detailed options and a proposed timeline to speed-up the JTA Implementation Plan to ensure that we provide better support to our ADF members and their families as they transition from military to civilian life.

Harmonising legislation

“Veterans’ legislation has long been cumbersome and confusing for veterans to understand.

“I am focused on the issue of structural and legislative reform and have also instructed the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to create a roadmap to harmonise the three Acts dealing with veterans’ compensation and rehabilitation.

“This report once again highlights the unacceptably high rate of suicide in the Defence and veteran communities, and the importance of the work of the Royal Commission.

“Suicide doesn’t just affect the individual, it is deeply traumatic for loved ones, families and whole communities. Our nation needs to do everything it can to prevent it.”

This is the fourth annual monitoring report of its kind, and expands on earlier work by including historical records of members with at least one day of ADF service since 1985. Previous research dated back to 2001.

The AIHW report is available at www.aihw.gov.au.

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