

Introduction – points of information

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was established in July 2021 to inquire and investigate systemic issues and identify themes among defence and veteran deaths by suicide, including risk factors before, during and after service in the Australian Defence Force.

RSL Queensland has engaged with the Royal Commission every step of the way, working in collaboration with the state and territory RSL branches and through the national office, RSL Australia. The Australian Government published the final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide on 9 September 2024.

The report is presented in seven volumes and makes 122 recommendations to the Australian Government focused on reducing defence and veteran suicide.

The report is available [online](#) along with [high-level summaries](#) provided by the Royal Commission.

The Australian Government is currently preparing its response to the report and may choose to accept and action all, some or none of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

RSL Queensland has undertaken a detailed analysis of the report, and this document highlights areas of focus.

It is important to remember that this Royal Commission inquiry looked at the factors and settings that may contribute to death by suicide. While the findings are sobering, they do not reflect the experience of every current or former serving member or their family. The majority of veterans transition well into civilian workplaces and communities and continue to make invaluable social and economic contributions to our state/nation.

As you engage with this document and the Royal Commission's report, please be mindful of your own health and wellbeing and reach out to Open Arms - Veterans and Families Counselling on 1800 011 046 or Lifeline crisis support on 13 11 14 if you need support.

A: Summary of the final report

Volume 1: Executive summary, recommendations and the fundamentals

The introductory volume outlines the unique nature of military service. It identifies the complexity of risk and protective factors that are associated with defence and veteran suicide and presents the case for change.

Volume 2: Serving the nation and Defence culture and leadership

This volume presents the Commission's findings about Australian Defence Force (ADF) recruitment and initial training, postings and deployments and the military employment classification system. It identifies physical and psychological stressors, risk factors for suicide and suicidality, and considers how military cultural values directly and indirectly contribute to suicide risk across service experience from recruitment through to post-service life.

Recommendations relate to changes required in ADF culture and leadership.

Volume 3: Military sexual violence, unacceptable behaviour and military justice

This volume covers the Commission's findings about the prevalence of military sexual violence and unacceptable behaviour, failings in complaints management and the ADF military justice scheme. The inquiry found that currently and historically bullying and harassment in all forms, including physical and sexual violence, is a not-uncommon experience of serving members.

The Commission found that the military justice system can exacerbate or cause poor mental health outcomes and increase the risk of suicide or suicidality. It also found that Defence's governance mechanisms do not recognise suicide prevention as an enterprise-wide priority.

Recommendations focus on: addressing and preventing sexual misconduct and unacceptable behaviour; increasing workplace protections; improvements to incidents and complaints processes and the military justice system; and revising the role and functions of the Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force.

Volume 4: Health care for serving and ex-serving members

Volume 4 identifies issues with ADF healthcare services and healthcare provision to serving members, as well as health care for ex-serving members. The Commission found that both physical and psychological illnesses and injuries are often poorly managed within the ADF. There is sustained stigma towards mental health both during and after service. Moral injury was found to have a significant impact on wellbeing and increase suicide risk.

Recommendations focus strongly on early intervention, pro-active approaches through screening, acknowledgement and action on moral injury, and for postvention actions following a serving member's death by suicide.

Volume 5: Transition, DVA and support for ex-serving organisations

The Commission found that transition can be an increased period of vulnerability for veterans and their families. It is often characterised by uncertainty as well as social and psychosocial disruption, which can increase risk of suicide and suicidality.

The Commission identified a clear need for integrated service delivery and better co-ordination across service providers to create a responsive and connected system of care for veterans and their families. It references evaluation and use of M-CARM and MT-Ready.

The Commission makes findings about DVA service and program delivery and culture and processes that have impacted negatively on the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families. It identifies progress against the Commission's August 2022 Interim Report.

Recommendations include improvements to Defence and DVA separation and transition processes and particular wellbeing and career supports.

Volume 6: Families, data and research and establishing a new entity

Volume 6 covers the Commission's findings about the role played by families of serving and ex-serving members and the impact of military service and post-service life on the family unit.

The Commission found limited data and evidence is available to inform Defence and DVA to safeguard current and ex-serving members against suicide risk factors and adverse mental health outcomes.

Recommendations include: expanding and strengthening research; data collection and analysis; and data sharing to support Defence and DVA's ability to monitor and evaluate suicide prevention initiatives. And for a new statutory entity to support governments, Defence, DVA and the wider defence and veteran ecosystem to build on the Commission's work, and to promote long term change and drive system reform.

Volume 7: Appendices

This volume explains operation and administration of the Commission, research summaries, and lists the previous reports and inquiries into defence and veteran suicide.

Key recommendations

All of the 122 recommendations are important suggested actions for the Australian Government to consider in responding to the findings of the recommendations.

Recommendations 1-70 focused primarily on Defence culture, practices and processes.

The remaining 52 recommendations focus mainly, but not wholly, on transition and life after service. These recommendations are directed largely towards DVA, ex-service organisations (ESOs) and other organisations who support veterans, with clear recommendations about the importance of collaboration and research-informed action.

RSL Queensland is well-positioned to inform the Australian Government's consideration of many of the recommendations and is planning a series of stakeholder communications and engagements to brief the Australian Government about RSL capability to support the Government's response.

The following recommendations are highlighted as of particular interest to the League because of the possibility to deliver systemic change for veterans and their families post-service and because RSL Queensland has the capability to help the Australian Government implement the recommendation.

Recommendation 81: The Department of Veterans' Affairs to fund a program to support members' wellbeing during transition to civilian life: The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) should fund and commission a cultural transition program to support members to build and maintain wellbeing during the transition from military to civilian life. The purpose of the program should be to empower members to develop the skills to adjust and integrate into civilian culture successfully and sustain social connections.

RSL Queensland comment:

RSL Queensland has partnered with Gallipoli Medical Research to provide an evidence-based approach to support a member experience a healthy transition to civilian life. The research commitment has led to the development of several tools, including MT-Ready and M-CARM to help current serving ADF members understand their preparedness to transition. Additional digital programs and (currently in pilot) face to face programs accompany these tools and enable members to understand cultural and psychological factors that may impact their ability to experience a healthy transition to civilian life and importantly, the tools aid the member address these factors.

Recommendation 87: Establish a new agency to focus on veteran wellbeing: The Australian Government should establish a new executive agency focused on veteran wellbeing. The new agency should have distinctive branding but be administratively nested within the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to ensure seamless information sharing and referrals.

RSL Queensland comment:

The Royal Commission has recommended that the proposed new veteran wellbeing agency should have a key role supporting veterans to transition from service to civilian life and to access early interventions and supports.

RSL Queensland has long called for DVA to take a wellbeing and whole of life focus. We also have critical expertise that can support the implementation of this recommendation through our experience in engaging with veterans in all timepoints in their defence journey and our sophisticated portfolio of services that address the prevalent conditions the veteran community may face.

Recommendation 88: Develop a national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing: A national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing should be developed, including a long-term capital and operational expenditure for veteran specific wraparound services.

RSL Queensland comment:

A national funding agreement has the potential to create clearer accountability and transparency between the roles of Commonwealth, State and Territory Government. This would also create better outcomes for veterans who are experiencing periods of vulnerability such as homelessness, incarceration, moving inter- and intra-state and accessing healthcare.

Recommendation 89: Establish a national peak body for ex-service organisations: The Australian Government, in consultation with ex-service organisations (ESOs), should establish a national peak body for ESOs following a co-design process. The role, functions, membership, governance and funding model of the peak body should be informed by the outcomes of the business case and agreed between the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the ESO sector. The funding model should not exclude participation of any eligible ESOs, particularly those who operate on a not-for-profit basis.

RSL Queensland comment:

This issue is already in progress thanks to a series of national ESO Forums delivered by the RSL in 2022 and 2023. From that work, RSL requested, based on the consensus of the ESOs that actively participated, that DVA invest in an independent consultation to develop a blueprint to establish an ESO Peak Body. The consultation is being led by the Nous Group and the findings are expected to be presented to DVA soon.

Recommendation 99: Improve compensation advocacy by funding professional paid advocates: The Australian Government should replace the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) grant program with an ongoing, demand-driven funding program for professional, paid veteran compensation advocates.

RSL Queensland comment:

This recommendation, if adopted, would see a significant change in the way advocacy is provided to veterans to help them navigate the DVA claims process. While RSL Queensland supports the principle of changes to advocacy that better meet the needs of veterans, we understand the enormous value and expertise that our volunteer advocates provide.

We are working to understand the intended impact of this recommendation and to identify any unintended consequences in order to provide advice into Government.

R.101: Give DVA clients more choice and autonomy: Veterans supported by the Department of Veterans' Affairs should be afforded similar levels of choice and autonomy to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, to the greatest extent possible.

RSL Queensland comment:

Enabling veterans to choose their rehabilitation provider and self-manage their budget for approved household assistance to align with the autonomy and payment conditions of NDIS clients and providers, is an initiative that to be maximised, should be informed by the learnings of the NDIS to avoid previous pitfalls and issues experienced by the scheme. Reimbursing veterans or their travel costs to see their preferred providers is a positive step, but does not negate the need to increase local health care services and provisions that are accessible to veterans and that understand their particular needs.

R.122 Establish a new statutory entity to oversee system reform across the whole Defence ecosystem: The Australian Government should establish a new statutory entity with the purpose of providing independent oversight and evidence-based advice in order to drive system reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members

RSL Queensland comment:

This is a very welcome and critical recommendation. Throughout the Royal Commission, RSL Queensland in collaboration with the national RSL network and RSL Australia has called for the establishment of an independent National Commissioner into Defence and Veteran Wellbeing to lead implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, and to keep enduring watch on the health and wellbeing of current and former ADF members and their families.