

Department of Defence

JSCFADT Review of the Defence Annual Report 2013-14 - 16 June 2015

Question on Notice No. 17 - Levels of persons returning to work

Senator O'Neill asked on 16 June 2015, Hansard page 4:

Senator O'NEILL: Can I just ask, on notice, for some more fine-grain information about the level of people who are of that 52 per cent returning to work. At what levels are they returning to work? Do you have any champions for mental health? Do you have any significant leaders who have shared their stories of having gone through mental health? Some of that detail would be helpful. Rather than today, I will ask it on notice.

Response:

On 16 June 2015, Rear Admiral Walker, in her statements to the JSCFADT, referred to defence held data showing that of the 4,592 rehabilitation cases that were closed during the financial year 2013-14, 813 of those members had a primary diagnosis of a mental health condition and were referred for an ADF Rehabilitation Program. Of those 813 a total of 421 or approximately 52% had an outcome of return to work.

A member's formal rehabilitation program will be closed if no longer required under the ADF Rehabilitation Program. This may be because the member has returned to a deployable Medical Employment Classification (MEC), or because the member has appropriate duties in the workplace, is actively engaged in their treatment and no longer requires the structure and monitoring provided by a rehabilitation program.

Table - Medical Employment Classification (MEC) breakdown of the 52% of members (421) who returned to work in FY2013-14:

MEC	Description	No. of Members	% of the 421 who Return to Work
MEC J1	Fully Employable and deployable	62	14.73
MEC J2, M2, L2	Fully Employable and deployable with restrictions	122	28.98
MEC J3	Rehabilitation (still rehabilitating but no longer require a formal program)	211	50.12
MEC J41/42	Alternate ADF Employment / Employment at Service discretion	5	1.19
MEC J40	Decision pending MECRB outcome (rehabilitation program closed, member no longer requires formal rehabilitation program)	21	4.99
	Total	421	100.01

Defence recognises that some ADF members, as in other military populations, may be reluctant to identify or recognise early symptoms of mental illness for fear that it may limit their opportunity for further deployment or impact on their career. Defence is committed to improving awareness and reducing stigma and barriers to care in order to encourage ADF personnel and their families experiencing mental health issues to seek help as early as possible.

In recent years we have engaged in a serious and transparent conversation with our Commanders, defence members, their families, the public, the media and ex-service organisations about the mental health and wellbeing of defence members.

Defence has encouraged a number of its members to talk about their experiences with overcoming PTSD in order to encourage other current and ex-serving personnel to seek support and treatment. By encouraging our high profile defence members and senior leaders to speak about their experiences and through the arts and theatre, we have informed ourselves and the Australian public of the nature and impact of mental health conditions in the ADF.

A key initiative in this regard is the annual ADF Mental Health Day, which provides the Chief of Defence Force, the Vice Chief of Defence Force, Service Chiefs and other leaders a formal opportunity to reduce stigma and champion good mental health, and gives ADF members the opportunity to speak openly about their mental health experiences and how they can best support each other through their mental health journey. A DVD is developed each year to address specific themes, featuring ADF members and their families who are willing to speak about their own mental health experiences and are considered to be leaders within their own cohorts. Themes have included recognising symptoms of PTSD and the treatment journey that members have taken to return to work; members discussing a range of mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD and their own recovery trajectory; and the theme of 'Staying Connected' which focused on the importance of maintaining a support

network with friends, family and colleagues, regardless of where the member is on their career path. The theme for 2015 is 'taking action' which will focus on how individuals can show leadership in mental health at all levels.

The Service Chiefs are involved in production of the DVD and provide an opening address outlining their view on mental health in their own Service. ADF Mental Health Day is launched by the Chief of Defence Force in order to demonstrate the importance of this initiative and to start the conversation about mental health. After viewing the DVD, units will engage in a guided discussion, led by their commanders, regarding the key themes outlined in the DVD. This format allows for unit commanders and sub-commanders to become champions for good mental health and to role model appropriate attitudes. Research shows that the attitudes of those in direct contact with members with a mental health issue have the greatest influence on help seeking behaviour and how those members are treated in the workplace either during treatment or through their return to work experience.