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Meeting, 23 July 2019, Parliament House, Canberra

The Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Veterans' Mental Health (the Council) met at Parliament House on 23 July 2019 for its second meeting of the year.

In opening the meeting the Chairman welcomed Mr Don Spinks AM to the Council in advance of receiving formal confirmation of his new appointment from the Minister, as the new Ex-officio member in his role as Repatriation Commissioner at DVA. Mr Spinks follows Major-General Mark Kelly's retirement from DVA in June 2019.

The Chair discussed correspondence that has been received since the last meeting on [4 April 2019](#). It was noted that the majority of correspondence does not sit within the Council's remit and where appropriate, was referred to DVA to respond.

The Chair briefed the Council on the recent National Mental Health Summit which brought together experts in veteran mental health and suicide prevention to assist in the development a new Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, supported by a National Action Plan to improve veterans' mental health, wellbeing and significantly reduce suicide.

The Council received comprehensive briefings from:

- Ms Liz Cosson AM CSC, Secretary of DVA who presented to the Council on a range of initiatives DVA is currently progressing and the findings in Productivity Commission's Report into the Compensation and Rehabilitation of Veterans — *A Better Way to Support Veterans*
- Mr Chris Burns CSC, SA National Mental Health Commissioner, who presented to the Council on peer work and future directions for mental health and wellbeing in Australia

Following Commissioner Chis Burns' presentations on peer work, the Council has invited Dr Stephanie Hodson, National Manager of Open Arms to present to the Council the Open Arms' Community and Peer Program at the November 2019 meeting.

The Council considered the current call within the press and social media for a Royal Commission into, among others, DVA and Veterans' Suicide. Council members agreed that a better outcome for our veterans would be for the considerable energy and resources that would be attracted to a Royal Commission, to be applied in better addressing the plethora of existing major reports and inquiries into veterans' wellbeing and their recommendations. The Council considers the current public rhetoric on calls for a Royal Commission into veterans' suicide is damaging to DVA and could paralyse the good work already being undertaken as part of DVA's transformation agenda which has potential to negatively impact or unnecessarily delay services and entitlements for veterans.

The Council continued discussion on the importance of ongoing work on the gap analysis of Government initiatives and pilots currently being undertaken with a key focus on transition and peer support, as well as work

that is currently underway as a result of the various research and reports available. The Council will continue to apply this gap analysis to inform their advice to Government in particular, through reinvigorating a communications strategy and potential recommendation for a consistent peer work model across DVA programs to better support veterans and their families.

The Council had an opportunity to discuss with Minister Chester the outcome of their deliberations throughout the day and noted the role of the Council in contributing to the new DVA Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a National Action Plan, where, a commitment from the Government has been made to implement both of these by end of 2019.

The Council is scheduled to meet again face to face for the last time this year on 28 November 2019 and will continue to progress significant work out of session.

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