

## No guarantee of child care at the VVCS for young mums

The children of Vietnam veterans have had a 300% higher suicide rate than their equivalents in the general community, a statistic resulting from veterans' families becoming dysfunctional because of veteran fathers' war caused psychological illnesses.

A recent study finds the wives of Vietnam veterans also have an elevated rates of thinking about, planning and attempting suicide.

We don't want those horrendous statistic repeated for the children and partners of our younger comrades in arms.

So it is vital to encourage the partners of younger servicemen/women as well as the servicemen/women themselves to seek help at the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) as soon as family dysfunction threatens.

But for mums with young children, finding child care for the period of the counselling may be difficult. Indeed, professional casual child care is almost impossible to find and if found may be prohibitively expensive.

Of course, some young mums may have accommodating neighbours or nearby family who will mind the children. And some Counselling Centres may be able to arrange appointments so there are several young mums who can look after each-others' children.

But failing any of these ad hoc costless arrangements, the VVCS refuses to provide child care. It will not, for instance, bring in a casual child minder or nanny.

Even if face to face counselling is considered most clinically appropriate in a particular case, but lack of child care prohibits it, only the second best option of telephone counselling will be offered.

The excuse given is 'expense'.

This is, to say the least, short sighted.

A few dollars for a casual child minder is of no consequence compared with the vast cost in suffering and welfare of a dysfunctional family.

As Professor Dunt said: 'There are too many barriers to seeking mental health care...?'

Clearly procuring child care is one of them.

Approaches on a number of occasions on this vital issue but have been rebuffed.

Is the Repatriation Commission really serious with its mantra of 'early intervention'?

Recently it contended that visiting the Counselling Service is no different from visits to the doctor or dentist.

We disagree.

Failing to seek counselling may have vastly more injurious consequences for the family including an increased risk of the suicide of the children and partners.

Bill Roberts OAM  
Acting National President