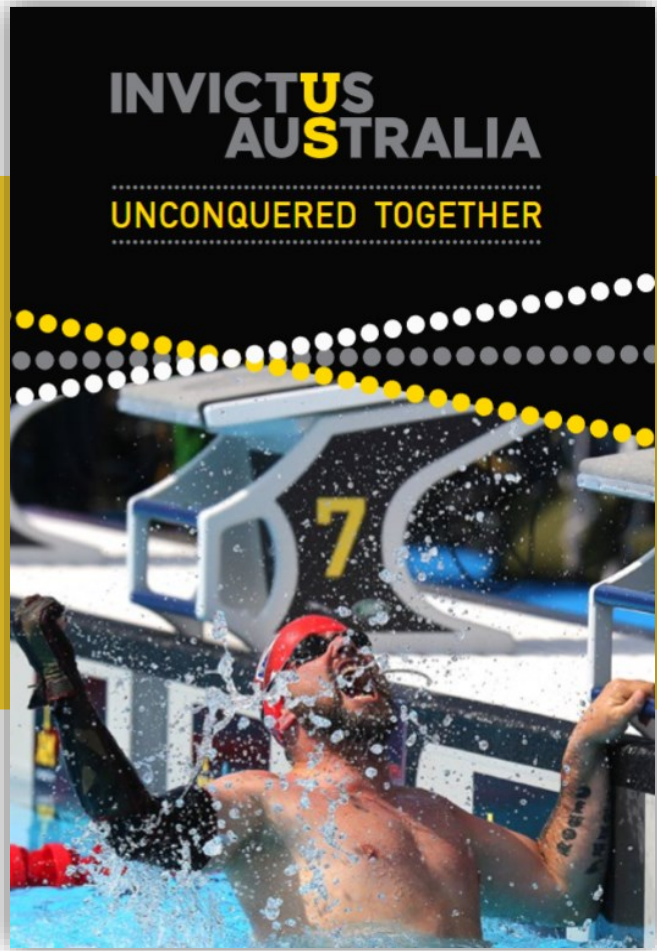


**INVICTUS AUSTRALIA**

Submission

February, 2023



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*Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence  
and Trade*

*Inquiry into adaptive sport programs for Australian  
Defence Force veterans*

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## 1. INVICTUS AUSTRALIA OVERVIEW

Invictus Australia is a positive and enduring legacy of the Invictus Games, held in Sydney in 2018 - an event that both captured the interest and goodwill of the nation and contributed toward the rehabilitation and support of veterans and their families.

Invictus Australia commenced operations initially as *Veteran Sport Australia* (VSA) at the conclusion of the 2018 Games. Due to the success of those Games and the achievements of VSA, the Invictus Games Foundation (UK) agreed to provide the rights to Australia to become the first nation to establish an Invictus program outside the Invictus Games. On 28 October 2021 Invictus Australia was launched. Invictus Australia is now being promoted as a model for other Invictus Games participating nations to follow.

Research conducted by Omnipol at the conclusion of the 2018 Games show an 83 percent awareness among Australians of Invictus. The research reinforced the positive perception of the Invictus brand, with 9 out of 10 respondents expressing their support for programs which would help veterans overcome physical injuries and mental health challenges. The same number of respondents agreed that the Invictus Games could make a significant difference in the lives of veterans with physical injuries and mental health challenges.

While the Invictus Games have proven to be an important and highly successful focus for veterans, the scope and value of Invictus Australia goes beyond a single event.

The ethos, values and brand profile engendered by the Games has proven valuable in extending a broader range of services and support to veterans and their families through community sport. Examples of Invictus Australia's work in the community include:

- Supporting the NRL's Battlefields to Footy Fields program since inception, which is training veterans to be referees, sports trainers and coaches in Rugby League;
- Establishing 'Team Veteran' which has become the fourth largest parkrun running club in Australia;
- Partnering with Archery Australia to provide nearly 1,000 veterans and their families an opportunity to try the sport;
- Building a volunteering platform with the Office of Sport in NSW to assist sport clubs and veterans to promote and apply for volunteering roles;
- Delivering community sport festivals, where a variety of sport and veteran service organisations are invited to take part. The most recent day in Canberra had over 350 attendees;
- Partnering with Soldier On to provide our sport expertise to assist with their social connections program.

Invictus Australia is the official partner of the Australian Defence Force for the delivery of Australian teams to the Invictus Games, Warrior Games and the *ADF Adaptive Sport Program* which underpins these teams. It is responsible for funding the involvement and managing the logistics of all former serving participants.

The majority of veterans and their families will not take part in the Invictus Games, but often will have an interest in involvement with local community sport and another level. Our national approach aims to build scale and consistency of opportunity, while our delivery and effort is focused on individual communities, their needs and wants.

The activities of Invictus Australia are wide ranging in scope. The community activities benefit veterans and their families in other ways than what is achieved through the Games alone. It has been shown that sport is both a reactive and a proactive way of managing and improving physical and mental health.

Opportunities provided by Invictus Australia offer a range of programs from general participation, competition, volunteering, officiating and all other roles available within a community sport environment. These opportunities are delivered in partnership with sport. Consequently, they achieve scale (there are over 70,000 sport clubs nationally), sustainability (programs, venues and instruction is already in place) and integration (because it's not always helpful to place individuals into an environment that is exclusively veterans).

Partnerships are vitally important to Invictus Australia. As an organisation we provide services that directly target veterans and their families as well as partnering with other organisations, particularly ex-service organisations, to help them better utilise sport for their communities.

The Invictus Australia Board and management have expertise in both the sport and veteran sectors. Consequently, it has the experience to deliver the best in sport outcomes for veterans and their families.

The delivery of the Invictus Australia programs are made possible through the direct support of commercial sponsors, fundraising activities as well as support from Federal and State Governments.

## 2. RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The role of adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans in addressing issues identified by the ongoing Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, with particular reference to:

**(a) current evidence on the benefits adaptive sport can provide to those with physical and/or mental health impairments, particularly those who have also served or trained in national defence;**

Sport as a method of improving physical and mental health, including as part of a rehabilitation process, has been proven effective in both domestic and international studies of Invictus Games competitors.

The Invictus Games Foundation *Impact Report*<sup>1</sup> states that by taking part in an Invictus Games:

- 87% have increased their confidence levels;
- 73% have developed social connections;
- 82% have engaged with the wider community; and
- 85% have gained a sense of belonging.

The ADF's own research<sup>2</sup> published in September 2022 examined the experience of Australian competitors in the ADF Adaptive Sport Program. Key findings included:

- A key objective of an effective transition from military to civilian life is the restoration of health and wellbeing through timely and effective rehabilitation, support and social integration;
- 89% of ADF Adaptive Sports Program participants who were surveyed said recreational and competitive activities had a positive impact on their recovery;
- Of that group, 57% indicated sport had played an extremely positive role in their rehabilitation;
- 78% reported greater engagement in physical activity after participating in the program;
- 85% of survey respondents would recommend the Adaptive Sports Program to other current or former serving ADF members.

The value of sport needs to be considered in a broad context. There is clear evidence that participation in sport can have benefit to physical and mental health, through the management and prevention of disease. It is also true that a healthy lifestyle is a key contributor to longevity of health.

In the case of mental health, sport offers a social connector and environment that can provide an avenue for individuals to re-discover purpose and meaning in their lives. It is one of the few parts of society that encourages face to face interaction and social activity. Sport also provides aspiration and goals for individuals attempting to follow a competition pathway or personal best result.

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<sup>1</sup> Invictus Games Foundation Impact Report 2020 (p.14)

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, A. 'More Important Than Winning': a Retrospective Online Research Survey Evaluating the Effects of Participating in an Adaptive Sports Program for Wounded, Injured and Ill Australian Defence Force Veterans (<https://jmvh.org/article/more-important-than-winning-a-retrospective-online-research-survey-evaluating-the-effects-of-participating-in-an-adaptive-sports-program-for-wounded-injured-and-ill-australian-defence-force-vete/>)

Sport participation can have a direct economic benefit. Invictus Australia's own case studies suggest that sport can be an effective part of a rehabilitation program, which ultimately seeks to help an individual recover from an issue they are experiencing and return to a more productive and fulfilling life. This has a direct economic benefit in the case of those receiving government assistance to rehabilitate (for example DVA clients). One such case study we conducted revealed over \$17,000 per annum was saved in DVA payments due to the introduction of sport to one individual's rehabilitation program.

Sport is often more attractive than clinical services and a 'softer' entry point to engage people. It's something that is available everywhere for people who live in Australia. A recent study by *parkrun Australia* found that 62% of Australians live within 5km of a parkrun. Invictus Australia established the "Team Veteran" parkrun club in 2020, which now ranks as the fourth largest club in Australia and sees veterans of all ages and abilities engage as participants and volunteers. Sport Australia estimates that there are over 70,000 sport clubs in Australia (aligned to the 96 recognised sports), which suggests that number of clubs is far greater when you include other private providers (unaffiliated programs and clubs).

Sport is an important part of Defence service. It is played on base, organised through the ADF's own sporting associations and is even played when Australians are on deployment. Our service men and women are among the fittest and healthiest individuals in our nation during their service, and sport and physical activity has played a role in achieving that outcome. There is more that can be done to continue to encourage and cultivate further engagement in sport beyond service. Particularly noting the issues that exist post transition (such as the decline in mental health for approximately 47%, and the tremendous challenge to address the suicide rate for those medically or involuntarily discharged).

**Recommendation 1** – the Australian Government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Australian Defence Force, recognise the substantial evidence proving the value and impact of adaptive sport programs, particularly the Invictus Games, and continue to encourage engagement in sport activities by their personnel and clients.

**(b) the role of sport in supporting individuals' transition from the Australian Defence Force into civilian life, especially how sport may assist veterans who meet criteria identifying them as being most at risk of suicide;**

*"Recent government inquiries have highlighted the need to improve the integration of service responses to meet the health and wellbeing needs of serving and ex-serving ADF personnel (JSCFADT 2015). The need to invest in prevention and early intervention strategies to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for these groups has also been highlighted. The Government has introduced further suicide prevention and mental health support services for serving and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families (AG 2017)." ([National suicide monitoring of serving & ex-serving ADF personnel, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#))*

This summary highlights that more consideration and attention needs to be given to prevention and early intervention programs. There is substantial evidence to support the case for sport as part of this solution, which reinforces the Invictus Australia view gained from first-hand experience with veterans and their families.

Sport opportunities are widespread in Australia; the challenge is to harness these opportunities for the benefit of veterans and their families. Especially since there are a variety of opportunities which can be tailored to suit individual interests and needs. In the Australian sporting environment, there are plenty of supportive communities who can provide new social networks, purpose and motivation for veterans and families.

Sport is an important part of Defence life and, Invictus Australia believes, involvement in sport should not end at transition. Sport is particularly useful when targeting a younger demographic, where other services may find it difficult to achieve engagement. Sport is preventative but it can also assist with rehabilitation, which makes it an ideal pursuit for those who are discharging from the ADF for involuntary or medical reasons. An individual's mental health can often fluctuate, and sport offers flexibility which can adapt to an individual's experience and circumstance.

Research shows that there is a health benefit from even minimal participation in physical activity, which will also help with many of the metabolic issues that veterans experience post service.

In addition, there is an economic benefit because sport has shown to achieve positive outcomes when combined with a rehabilitation program. Ultimately, this could reduce the requirement for and cost to DVA for clinical treatment.

**Recommendation 2** – the Australian Government, through the ADF's Joint Transition Authority, should further consider the use of sport and key organisations providing these programs as referral points for personnel discharging from the ADF. Especially for those being involuntarily or medically discharged.

**Recommendation 3** - the Australian Government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, should make further provision for sport and recreation activities to be funded for their clients, where it could assist with the rehabilitation.

### **(c) the Australian Defence Force's use of adaptive sport;**

Invictus Australia is the official partner of the Australian Defence Force on the delivery of the *ADF Adaptive Sport Program*, and Australian Teams that are selected from this program – including the Australian Invictus Team and the Australian Warrior Games Team. This program is an integrated program of current and former serving members of the ADF. All participants have self-nominated due to a physical or mental health condition and the belief that this program may assist with their ongoing recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Research conducted by Dr Anna Lewis referenced earlier in this submission and titled '*More Important Than Winning: a Retrospective Online Research Survey Evaluating the Effects of Participating in an Adaptive Sports Program for Wounded, Injured and Ill Australian Defence Force Veterans*' outlines the value to participants in the ADF Adaptive Sport Program.

Approximately 80 percent of applications to the ADF Adaptive Sport Program are made from the former serving community, or by current serving members who are in the process of discharging from the ADF (many on medical grounds). This is a particularly important group when considering the statistics around Defence and veteran suicide.

Given limitations exist on team sizes for Invictus Games, the majority of applicants will not progress to selection for the program or one of the Teams it supports. Invictus Australia is currently developing a program to support all individuals who apply, and to address this gap. This work will focus on domestic activities and other competition pathways, with the aim to achieve the same positive outcomes expressed by Invictus Games participants.

**Recommendation 4** – the Australian Government should continue to encourage Australian attendance at international sporting events, such as the Invictus Games and Warrior Games, due to the outcomes it delivers for the veterans and families involved. It should also acknowledge and allocate resources to support as many applicants as possible, including those who are not selected for the Games.

**(d) whether there are any gaps in services and demand for adaptive sport by the veteran community, and, if so, how these gaps can be addressed;**

There is a large and growing demand for Invictus Australia services across Australia. With the investment by the Federal Government, Invictus Australia will now have a presence in most States and Territories in 2023. However, even with this increased presence, the demand for Invictus Australia services will exceed our capacity to adequately meet this demand, particularly at the community level. With additional financial support, Invictus Australia will be better placed to meet this challenge.

The Invictus Australia model of working with sport and partnering with other organisations provides the capability to scale nationally. That means that even if we don't have a physical staff presence in a community, it won't prevent us helping individuals in that community find and access a sporting opportunity. The shortcoming is in the level and quality of engagement we can provide when supporting from afar.

In addition to Invictus Australia's goals and objectives, through feedback provided by other programs and initiatives which seek to use sport for the benefit of veterans, there remain challenges. These are both financial and strategic in nature.

Invictus Australia is aware of a variety of sport-based programs available for veterans, which could benefit from investment and strategic support and advice. These programs often face challenges with sustainability, insurances, training and education, advertising and marketing, facilities and equipment. It would be valuable, therefore, to consider how Invictus Australia may assist in this coordination and assistance.

**Recommendation 5** – the Australian Government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, work with Invictus Australia to consider the strategic approach to supporting community sport initiatives that support the health and wellbeing of veterans; how these programs could be better supported and resourced.

**(e) the equitability of current funding for adaptive sport, and how the accessibility of adaptive sport can be improved for veterans who are not a part of Invictus programs;**

Invictus Australia is using its available resources from the Federal Government to achieve a balanced and equitable outcome for veterans through the programs and initiatives it delivers. A key consideration on equitability is a program's ability to engage the broadest cross-section of the community and to make available sporting opportunities and experiences to cater for all levels and interests. Invictus Australia achieves this through the targeted application of resources to deliver both Invictus Games Teams and community program outcomes.

Invictus Australia has the advantage of working closely with and understanding the nature of our sporting system and the key organisations and structures in it. This has enabled Invictus Australia to maximise the benefits of the financial investment.

Invictus Australia is not an organisation with a narrow focus on the Invictus Team alone. It has a wide and detailed engagement with the community to support thousands of veterans in programs which fall outside the Invictus Games itself. Competitive sport and events are but one element of what sport can offer veterans and their families. It is the objective of Invictus Australia to open up the full spectrum of sport for the benefit of this community. This is one of the most valued features in our approach by veterans and their families.

Not everyone can or desires to compete at an Invictus Games. This is a fundamental reason why Invictus Australia was established - to widen the interface between the whole of sport and the veteran community. High profile events and broader participation need to be seen as elements of the same sport continuum.

To illustrate the point that sport engagement is multidimensional, for every Invictus Team supported by Invictus Australia more than 3,000 individuals at the same time are supported through our community work. This community participation is growing substantially as Invictus Australia broadens its reach across the country.

Finally, when considering equity of investment, the role and levels of assistance provided by State and Local Government should be taken into account. As is the case in the Australia sport system, Governments of all levels contribute to delivering outcomes for their communities.

**Recommendation 6** – the Australian Government consider additional investment to support local community efforts to engage veteran and their families in adaptive sport programs, that demonstrate effectiveness in improving veteran and family health and wellbeing.

**(f) the potential for a centralised authority to play a role in coordination or resourcing to provide access and where appropriate, enable consistency, in the use of adaptive sport to support rehabilitation, transition or reintegration for serving members and veterans around the nation and across support services and organisations;**

To date, the development of sporting programs focused on veterans and their families has grown organically. Understandably this results in an ad hoc or fragmented approach, which can create resourcing and coordination challenges. There would be merit in considering how a coordinating agency may deliver better support, coordination and resourcing to improve collaboration and outcomes for veterans and their families.



Invictus Australia believes in the power of sport to transform lives, and its ability to provide an avenue for our service men and women, and their families, to improve their health and wellbeing. Through this vision, we are committed to supporting the Australian Government and the Department of Veterans Affairs and the ADF, to maximise those benefits of sport.

The remit of Invictus Australia is to operate across both the veteran and sport sectors. Consequently, Invictus Australia has built an integrated system of collaboration with agencies and organisations across both sectors. It has managed to position itself not only as a service organisation to both individual veterans and family members, but also as a support and advisory service to other ex-service organisations. This system-wide approach is an effective strategy to deliver long-term sustainability, which maximises opportunities and which is efficient and effective.

Invictus Australia is not a member-based organisation. While it tracks participants, it does not require anyone to sign-on as a member of Invictus Australia to access services thereby removing any barrier to participation. These services are available to all veterans and their families.

Should the Australian Government seek to take more advantage of the opportunities sport offers, Invictus Australia would be pleased to lend our expertise and advice.

**Recommendation 7** – the Australian Government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, consider using the expertise of Invictus Australia to help improve the support available through sport and recreation programs targeting veterans and their families.

**(g) whether eligibility for the Australian Sports Medal, or similar recognition, should be extended to teams that participated in the Invictus Games prior to 2018 and other veterans' teams representing Australia in international events; and**

Invictus Australia is aware of some of the concerns raised by individuals in the veteran community regarding the Australian Sport Medal. In particular, consideration of Australian teams prior to the 2018 Games and for roles involved with the delivery of the 2018 Games that were outside the Team.

Our assessment of the criteria suggests to us that if any review is to be undertaken, it should not focus exclusively on Invictus Team recognition. If a review is undertaken, it should consider the overall criteria and the role of the Australian Sports Medal in recognition of accomplishment.

We note that the origin of the Australian Sports Medal was to recognise members of the Australian Teams and Organising Committee of the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The variation of the criteria to include recent representative teams opens up questions about recognition of past teams and future teams. Consistency of application and justification for the application is important to maintain the integrity of the award.

**Recommendation 8** – that any review of the Australian Sports Medal does not exclusively consider Invictus Games Team, and instead focuses on the overall criteria and it's application.

**(h) any other related matters.**

In this submission we have used 'sport' and 'Adaptive Sport' terminology interchangeably. Invictus Australia suggest it would be helpful to consider the definition of 'Adaptive Sport', as it can mean different things to different people. Often it is confused with 'Para-sport', which can generally be described as sport for people with a disability, or sports that are included as part of the Paralympic Games or similar events. The definition of 'Adaptive Sport' needs to be given a broader context due to its application.

Our view is that the term Adaptive Sport be used in a broad sense, and simply refer to sport where some additional support is required – for example through modification to equipment, or through additional staff supervision or rule modifications. This definition includes sports that are commonly known as adaptive (an example being wheelchair basketball) and traditional sports that may have minimal or non-visible support made available for participants. The Invictus Games is a good example of Adaptive Sport as it combines those sports such as wheelchair basketball but also sports with minimal visual adaptations such as athletics and cycling.

**Recommendation 9** – that the Australian Government used a broad interpretation of the term 'Adaptive Sport' so as not to limit the value and experience of all veterans and their families.

## Attachment - Underpinning principles

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1. Improve physical and mental wellbeing;
2. Help the transition from the ADF to civilian life;
3. Decrease social isolation and loneliness;
4. Develop a sense of purpose and deeper social connections; and
5. Deliver economic benefits to the community.

### **1. Veterans are vulnerable at transition, and during the years post transition, and sport provides an opportunity for them and their families to integrate with a new community.**

Transitioning from the ADF can be “challenging and unique”<sup>3</sup> and there can be “prolonged periods of instability and uncertainty.”<sup>4</sup>

Through sport and recreation, there is the opportunity for transitioning veterans to join supportive, structured communities. The Productivity Commission’s 2019 ‘A Better Way to Support Veterans’ Inquiry Report (‘Inquiry Report’) identified that “providing effective transition support for veterans and their families”, and “enabling opportunities for social integration”, should be objectives of a veteran support system.<sup>5</sup>

Importantly, sport and physical activity are fundamental, structured parts of military service. Members spend time each day maintaining physical health, with support and facilities always available. Sport and physical activity - as a feature of life in the ADF and an iconic Australian pastime - can be maintained on entering civilian life. However, for many, this will only be successful if targeted, coordinated and integrated with a wider network of support.

Additionally, ‘transition’ is not confined to the day that members leave service. It is an ongoing journey that starts while in service and ends years after joining civilian life.

#### Current situation

- Approximately 6,000 members of the ADF transition into civilian life each year.<sup>6</sup>
- The median length of service of permanent ADF members is currently 8.7 years and the mean is less than 8 years.<sup>7</sup>
- Approximately 18% of those who leave the ADF do so for medical reasons.<sup>8</sup>
- Male ex-service personnel under 30 years old are twice as likely to die by suicide compared to men of the same age.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Transition Taskforce – Improving the Transition Experience, p.27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>5</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, ‘A Better Way to Support Veterans’, Overview & Recommendations, No.93, 27 June 2019, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.30.

<sup>7</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, ‘A Better Way to Support Veterans’, Volume 1, No.93, 27 June 2019, p.31

<sup>8</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.34.

- The suicide rate for all male ex-service personnel is 18% higher than the rate for Australian men.<sup>10</sup>
- The age-adjusted rate of suicide, when compared to the Australian population, is 2.15 times higher for ex-serving women.<sup>11</sup>
- 1,273 former and serving Defence personnel have taken their lives between 2001-2019.<sup>12</sup>
- Three in four recently transitioned ADF personnel have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime.<sup>13</sup>
- An estimated 46% of ADF members who had transitioned from full-time service within the past five years met 12-month diagnostic criteria for a mental health disorder using a structured diagnostic interview.<sup>14</sup>
- More than one in five recently transitioned ADF members report suicide ideation, plans or attempts.<sup>15</sup>

The Productivity Commission's Inquiry Report highlighted the considerable challenges that transitioning members are exposed on to leaving service and contended that "the rhetoric around the importance of transition is not matched by effective action."<sup>16</sup> The Inquiry Report noted that "transition challenges result from the change in responsibilities of defence personnel and their disconnect from a supportive social network."<sup>17</sup> One veteran told the Productivity Commission that:

"On discharge I was lost, you need to belong."<sup>18</sup>

The Productivity Commission also noted that there is a "sound economic case for good transition support" and that "smooth transitions contribute to the wellbeing of veterans and their families, potentially increase labour force participation and reduce reliance on other forms of government support."<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Veterans benefit from connecting and engaging with the mainstream Australian sports system.**

Veterans have the opportunity to benefit from engaging with existing systems within recognised sports and recreation bodies. This can include benefiting from established support networks, pathways and ongoing opportunities for participation.

Through sport and recreation, veterans and their families have the opportunity to integrate into supportive communities. This can play an important role in re-establishing a "sense of purpose and

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<sup>10</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, 'A Better Way to Support Veterans', Volume 1, No.93, 27 June 2019, p.34.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'National suicide monitoring of serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel: 2019 update', 29 November 2019, p.13.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/2021-1/september/annual-defence-suicide-deaths-reporting>.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'A profile of Australia's veterans 2018', p.48.

<sup>14</sup> Van Hooff M, Lawrence-Wood E, Hodson S, Sadler N, Benassi H, Hansen C, Grace B, Avery J, Searle A, Iannos M, Abraham M, Baur J, McFarlane A, 2018, Mental Health Prevalence, Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Study, the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, p.iv.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'A profile of Australia's veterans 2018', p.41.

<sup>16</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

sense of belonging”, which can be significant challenges for transitioning veterans.<sup>20</sup> Integration can also play a role in tackling social determinants such as social isolation and a lack of supportive networks, and “establishing new community connections” is particularly important for enabling effective transitions.<sup>21</sup>

This principle builds on the Productivity Commission identifying that “recognising that mainstream services are a complement to veteran-specific services” is one element of a new ‘lifetime approach’ to supporting veterans.<sup>22</sup> It also aligns with the Productivity Commission’s position that the veteran support system can play a role in “enabling opportunities for social integration.”<sup>23</sup>

#### Current situation

- There are approximately 70,000 non-profit sport clubs and associations across Australia.<sup>24</sup>
- An estimated one in six men who have served in the ADF live alone.<sup>25</sup>
- A 2015 study measuring the prevalence of mental health disorders among ADF personnel who discharged between 2010 and 2014 estimated that 75% of recently transitioned personnel experienced a mental health disorder at some stage in their lifetime. The most common classes of lifetime mental disorders were alcohol disorders (48%) and anxiety disorders (46%).<sup>26</sup>

### **3. Through involvement in sport, veterans and their families increase physical health and fitness and improve mental wellbeing.**

Sport and recreation provide important opportunities for veterans and their families to maintain and increase levels of physical activity, leading to healthier lifestyles. Further, through engaging with sport and recreation, veterans and their families have the opportunity to experience improved mental health outcomes, tackling a range of issues including anxiety and depression.

#### Current situation

- An estimated three in four men who have served in the ADF have an increased risk of metabolic complications.<sup>27</sup>
- About 18% of those who leave the ADF do so for medical reasons.<sup>28</sup>
- Half of people who have served in the ADF have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime.<sup>29</sup>
- One in five serving ADF personnel had experienced a mental health disorder in the previous 12 months before a 2010 study.<sup>30</sup>

### **4. Supporting veterans and their families to become involved in sport in a coordinated and integrated way is a proactive response to the challenges Australia’s veterans are facing and will also deliver long-term economic benefits to the Australian economy.**

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<sup>20</sup> Transition Taskforce – Improving the Transition Experience, p.46

<sup>21</sup> Transition Taskforce – Improving the Transition Experience, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>24</sup> Scheerder, J. et al., ‘*Sport Policy Systems and Sport Federations*’, 2017, p.22.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘*A profile of Australia’s veterans 2018*’, p.27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.48.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.57.

<sup>28</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.7.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘*A profile of Australia’s veterans 2018*’, p.47.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.48.

Engaging with sport and recreation is a proactive way of addressing many of the physical and mental wellbeing issues that are prevalent throughout the veteran community. In addition, a comparatively small contribution to proactive initiatives to improve health and wellbeing - compared to more expensive clinical measures - could lead to considerable economic benefits.

In making a case for reforming the current veterans' compensation and rehabilitation system, the Productivity Commission's Inquiry Report contended that "a greater focus on wellness and lifetime costs should also translate into increased economic and social participation of veterans and reduced use of income support."<sup>31</sup>

#### Current situation

- Australia has a deep commitment to supporting the veteran community and has a generous support system administered by the DVA.
- The value created for each dollar spent in Australian sport is estimated to be at least \$7 for each dollar spent.<sup>32</sup>
- In 2017-18, DVA spent \$13.2 billion supporting about 166,000 veterans and 117,000 dependents (about \$47,000 per client),<sup>33</sup> with \$5.3 billion spent on health care and wellbeing.<sup>34</sup>
- According to the Productivity Commission, there are challenges associated with the current system of support, including that it "fails to focus on the lifetime wellbeing of veterans."<sup>35</sup>
- It is estimated that social exclusion costs the Australian economy \$45 billion annually and affects 6.7 million people.<sup>36</sup>
- Physical inactivity is a major contributing factor to the development of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, bowel cancer, dementia, coronary heart disease and stroke.<sup>37</sup>
- A recent study by AIHW indicated that physical inactivity contributed 2.6% of the total disease burden in 2011, increasing to 9% when combined with the burden resulting from people being overweight and obese.<sup>38</sup>
- Consistent with health guidance, if Australia is to reap the benefits of activity, the nation requires more people regularly being active at least 150 minutes per week. If those at risk achieved this level of activity, 26% of the future disease burden could be avoided.<sup>39</sup>
- It is estimated that mental ill health costs the economy almost \$60 billion per year, with absenteeism and presenteeism being a significant symptom for sufferers.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.43.

<sup>32</sup> The Boston Consulting Group, *'Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017'*, p.46.

<sup>33</sup> Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Overview & Recommendations, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> The Inclusive Australia Social Inclusion Index: 2019 Report, Inclusive Australia.

<sup>37</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017. Impact of physical inactivity as a risk factor for chronic conditions: Australian Burden of Disease Study. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no. 15 Cat. No. BOD 16. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> Investing to Save: The Economic Benefits for Australia of Investment in Mental Health Reform, Mental Health Australia and KPMG, 2018.



<sup>41</sup> Table references available at: <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/the-value-and-benefits-of-sport>