

# VETERAN GAMES

AUSTRALIA



29 SEP - 02 OCT 2023

# EVENT LAUNCH



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Veteran Games Australia 2023 will be the inaugural launch of an annual event designed to celebrate and showcase the skills and excellence of our Veteran Community in a format that is exciting and engaging for the wider public. The preparations and conduct will focus on providing proactive physical and mental health outcomes for all involved, while working to shape a positive and aspirational contemporary Veteran narrative. Outcomes have been designed to address key recommendations drawn from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Interim Report.

The 2023 event will be held during the period 29 September - 02 October at the Gold Coast Sports Precinct. The format will be of 3 days of Heats followed by Finals to be held on 02 October (King's Birthday holiday in QLD). Competitions will include Team Tug-of-War, Team Obstacle Course, and a number of other Military styled activities designed to test the teamwork and problem solving skill sets of competitors. The event location will be developed into an immersive festival experience catered to families and the general public.

In order to compete, Veterans (current and former serving) will be required to form a team of eight (8) and pass a basic fitness test. There is also scope to conduct tryouts at Military base locations dependent upon support from the ADF. Nominations and key event coordination will be conducted via <https://veterangames.com/>

Veteran Support Force LTD is the operating organisation and is an ACNC Registered Charity with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status. Funding will be sought via a corporate sponsorships structure and Government grants will be sought. The event is expected to become self sustainable in Year 2, and year on year reinvestment will support a five (5) year glidepath to include other Coalition Military nations and expand to become a global annual event.

# THE PROBLEM

Over the past two decades, more than 1,200 Australian Defence Force Veterans and serving personnel have died by suicide – 3x higher than the number previously reported. The unfolding mental health crisis is the result of our splintered and isolated Veteran community.

Veteran Support Force has been at the forefront of the current Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. During the past two years, we have conducted extensive consultation throughout the Veteran community, identifying the need for initiatives that better support community connection and cohesion, through purposeful collaboration.

Within military service, sports and competition provide a key opportunity for Veteran groups to come together with purpose, in competition and pursuing excellence in team events. As it stands, the only opportunity for this to occur outside of the ADF, is through the Invictus Games – an initiative designed to provide purpose and community for wounded and injured Veterans.

However, many able-bodied Veterans who do not qualify to participate in the Invictus Games are voicing the need for a competitive initiative that caters to all Veterans. This would directly support Veteran mental health improvement opportunities, help those who no longer serve regain purpose, and support Veteran employment opportunities.

**THE LAST THREE YEARS HAVE SEEN VETERAN ISSUES PUSHED TO THE FOREFRONT OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY AND MEDIA. MANY VETERAN ORGANISATIONS HAVE STRUGGLED TO BRING ABOUT COMMUNITY SUPPORT SUCCESSFULLY, WHILE SUBSEQUENTLY BEING ABLE TO REPRESENT VETERAN ISSUES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.**

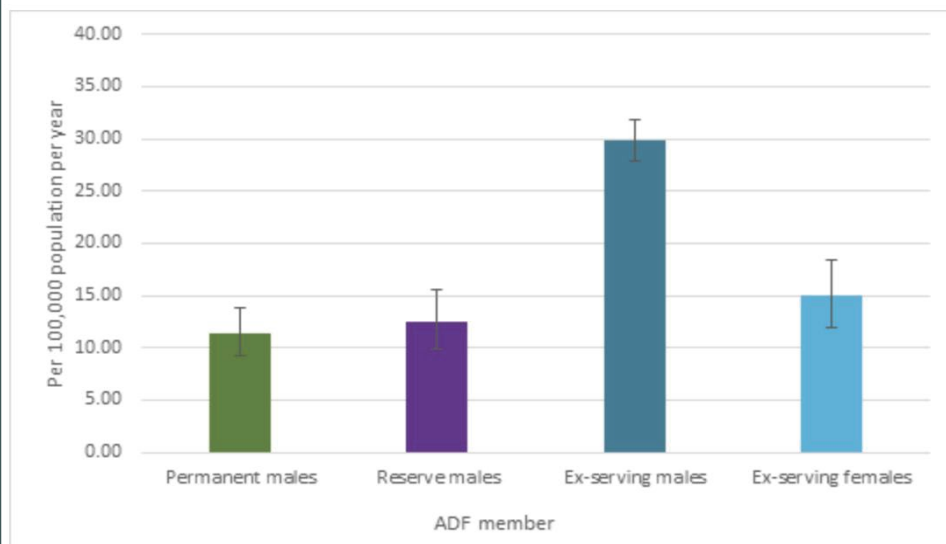
VETERAN GAMES - AUSTRALIA

In September 2021, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published its most recent annual report of the rates of suicide among serving and ex-serving ADF members. The report identified 1,273 deaths by suicide that occurred between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2019 in those who had served at least one day since 1 January 1985. Of these 1,273, a total of 211 were serving (permanent and reserve) and 1,062 were ex-serving ADF members.

Rates of suicidality are higher among those who no longer serve fulltime in the ADF. A study of regular ADF members and members who transitioned out of the ADF or to the reserves found that:

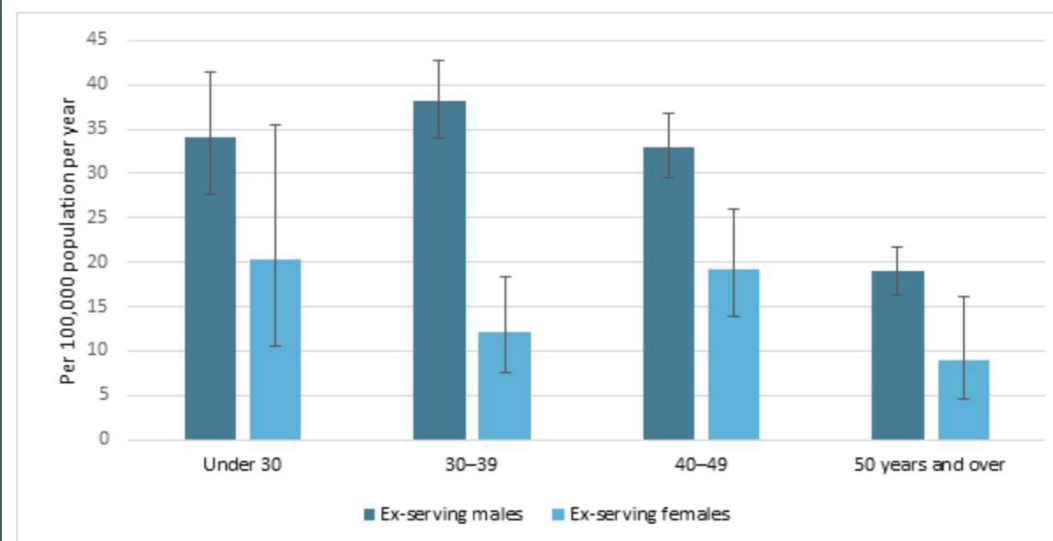
- **13.2% of regular ADF members and 28.9% of transitioned ADF members felt life was not worth living.**
- **8.6% of regular ADF members and 21.2% of transitioned ADF members felt so low that they thought about committing suicide.**
- **1.8% of regular ADF members and 7.9% of transitioned ADF members had made a suicide plan.**
- **0.6% of regular ADF members and 2.0% of transitioned ADF members had attempted suicide.**

Figure 1: Suicide rate by service status group and sex, 2002–2019



Source: AIHW analysis of linked Defence historical personnel data–PMKeyS–NDI data 1985–2019.

Figure 4: Suicide rate by age group, ex-serving males and females, 2002–2019



Source: AIHW analysis of linked Defence historical personnel data–PMKeyS–NDI data 1985–2019.

VETERAN GAMES - AUSTRALIA

# ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE & VETERAN SUICIDE INTERIM REPORT

## IDENTITY AFTER SERVICE

**73.** In submissions, people with lived experience expressed a loss of identify following transition to civilian life, regardless of the reason for discharge.<sup>99</sup> One submission said:

Myself and hundreds of other veterans deal with a key problem when we leave the Defence Force. We lose everything. Our identity, our families, and our belongings.<sup>100</sup>

**74.** Ex-serving members expressed a sense of worthlessness when leaving the ADF because they saw their purpose, self-worth and success as tied to their job.<sup>101</sup> One submission said:

When you join the Army you are aware it isn't just a 9-5 job. After years and years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice the uniform becomes part of your identity ... I remember telling my psychologist the Army is my life'. My job was my everything, and to lose that made me feel like I was going to lose myself, and that life was no longer worth living. This challenge is still ongoing ... since separating I often think that my life is complete after my military career - no other jobs are going to compare ...<sup>102</sup>

**75.** Some ex-serving members experienced difficulty with creating a new purpose after their ADF career.<sup>103</sup> One serving member attributed this to the AD's lack of assistance in 'deconstructing that identity and helping them on the path towards a new one',<sup>104</sup> Some ex-serving members said they believe re-conditioning for civilian life is as important as preparation for service and warfare.<sup>105</sup>

**Royal Commission Interim Report - Pages 44-45**

VETERAN GAMES - AUSTRALIA

# ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE & VETERAN SUICIDE INTERIM REPORT

## TRANSITION IS A PERIOD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

**343.** A National Mental Health Commission report recognised that a key component of making a successful transition is undergoing a psychological transformation from being a warrior to becoming a civilian.<sup>461</sup> But this psychological transformation can be very challenging, as it is characterised by extensive and multiple losses – loss of purpose, loss of identity, and loss of culture and community.

## PURPOSE

**344.** Serving in the military gives members a strong sense of purpose, and the satisfaction that comes from contributing to something greater than themselves. This purpose is often sorely missed by veterans during and after their transition.

## IDENTITY

**347.** When veterans are serving, their roles and ranks in the military are so intrinsic to their sense of self that it becomes a key component of their identity.<sup>464</sup> The loss of this identity at transition can be troubling.

**348.** In her Preliminary Interim Report (the Boss report), the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, Dr Bernadette Boss CSC, found that because a collective identity and ‘service before self’ are so strongly embedded in ADF culture, transitioning members do not always have a strong individual identity to fall back on.<sup>465</sup> Instead, they need to construct a new identity:

After leaving it was necessary to construct a new identity within which I could perceive myself in the world, separate from rank and uniform. This was more difficult than I thought, even though I was considered less ‘military’ than others in the ADF. I am still continuing this process four years on and only now feel I am 80% of the way there. I am not surprised that the more regimentally-inclined people struggle to self-validate outside of the ADF’s society (which is a separate society from Australia).<sup>466</sup>

## VETERAN GAMES - AUSTRALIA

# ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE & VETERAN SUICIDE INTERIM REPORT

- 349.** One submission that we received told us that ‘loss of self-worth when leaving defence’ was one of the major reasons for suicide among his veteran peers.<sup>467</sup> Another said:

When you join the Army you are aware it isn’t just a 9-5 job. After years and years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice the uniform becomes part of your identity. When I was admitted to a health centre ... I remember telling my psychologist ‘the Army is my life’.<sup>468</sup>

- 350.** Even those who served for only a short period of time have a distinctive perspective on life that significantly influences how they live after they have transitioned from the ADF.<sup>469</sup>

### Royal Commission Interim Report - Pages 44-45

## CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

- 351.** Many veterans told the Royal Commission about the profound challenges associated with losing the culture and community they had had with their ADF mates and peers. For example, one submission said that ADF members:

are used to having superiors that we can talk to, to get us through the tougher times and peers that are around our ages, experiencing the same things we are, that we know we can turn to for help.<sup>470</sup>

- 352.** According to another submission:

A real difficulty with the process of transition is that a member is often removed from his last unit locality and thus deprived of the support from his fellow soldiers and mates.<sup>471</sup>

### Royal Commission Interim Report - Pages 134-135

# VETERAN GAMES

The Veterans Games will be an Australian-first annual team competition including events that replicate activities conducted within active military service and combat, including team tug-of-war, obstacle courses, and other problem-solving military skills events. The Gold Coast has been selected as the host location due to the Commonwealth Games facilities, strong tourism offering, warm climate, and the strong support from the City of Gold Coast Mayor and Council.

Veteran Games will be designed to focus on the development and conduct of in-person community engagements and events. With the need to facilitate what we term as an increase in 'mental fitness' activities, to enable Veterans and family members to get together, connect, decompress, problem solve and better enable resolution and support before the need for more qualified services or clinical interventions.

This is recognising the 'unique nature of service' and placing high priority on supporting the establishment and strengthening of community, Veteran culture, individual identity and collective values through shared experiences and mateship.

**THE VETERAN GAMES WILL ACHIEVE CUT-THROUGH RESULTS BY REACHING, COMMUNICATING AND CONNECTING WITH VETERANS - WHILE BRINGING ABOUT MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION. THIS WILL DIRECTLY IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THOUSANDS OF VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.**







““”

**“AS MAYOR, I WOULD BE WILLING TO TAKE A PROPOSAL TO FULL COUNCIL TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, THROUGH A RANGE OF MEASURES, TO BACK A VETERANS’ GAMES CARNIVAL ON THE COAST.”**

- CITY OF GOLD COAST MAYOR, TOM TATE (MAY 2022)



# EVENT OVERVIEW

- 01** A 4 Day Veteran Games event to be held 29 September – 02 October 2023 utilising the Gold Coast Sports Precinct.
- 02** Teams of 8 Veterans (current and former serving) from across the country converge on the Gold Coast and complete a compulsory fitness test on arrival. This is then followed by 3 days of competition heats and finals to be held on the last day (October 2nd).
- 03** The Veteran Games will comprise of military styled team events including Obstacle Course, Tug-of-War, and other problem-solving military skills competitions. The events area surrounds will be developed into a festival precinct catered towards families and the general public.
- 04** Key sponsors will be engaged in order to fund the conduct of the event. Profits from the event will be reinvested into the subsequent annual event planning and conduct.
- 05** Registration and key coordination functions will be through the hosted domain [www.VeteranGames.com](http://www.VeteranGames.com)
- 06** Veteran Support Force LTD, the registered Veterans' mental health Charity with DGR status, will be the key support organisation in partnership with the City of Gold Coast for the conduct of the event. Funding will be sought via a corporate sponsorships structure and Government grants.
- 07** Invitational teams may be invited to compete in the Veteran Games launch or subsequent years. These may include - Emergency Services, Coalition Military Partners including the USA, UK, Canada, New Zealand and others that have served with our Veterans overseas.
- 08** Pending the success of the Veteran Games Australia inaugural event, year on year reinvestment will support a five (5) year glidepath to include other Coalition Military nations and expand to become a global annual event. This may include the scope to conduct a similar annual event in the northern hemisphere at a 6 month off-set once the model is proven.

# MARKET OPPORTUNITY

## KEY STATISTICS

More than half a million Australians (581,139) have served, or are currently serving, in the ADF.

There are 84,865 current serving members and 496,276 former serving members.

One in twenty (5.3 per cent) of Australian households reported at least one person who had served or is serving in the ADF.

Service in the Australian Defence Force(a) by age(b), 2021 Census

Age	Currently serving in the regular service	Currently serving in the reserves service	Previously served and not currently serving(c)
15-19 years	3,005	404	748
20-24 years	11,708	2,102	3,986
25-29 years	11,540	3,036	9,726
30-34 years	9,627	3,447	16,718
35-39 years	7,677	3,335	19,385
40-44 years	5,281	2,555	22,522
45-49 years	4,543	2,427	30,305
50-54 years	3,984	2,525	40,368
55-59 years	2,154	2,559	44,262
60-64 years	764	2,186	44,999
65-69 years	0	0	47,679
70-74 years	0	0	81,758
75-79 years	0	0	45,821
80-84 years	0	0	39,601
85 years and over	0	0	48,396

Highest risks of Mental Health Issues & Suicidality

Service in the Australian Defence Force(a) by state and territory(b), 2021 Census

	Currently serving in the regular service	Currently serving in the reserves service	Previously served and not currently serving(c)	Total ever served(d)
New South Wales	18,007	6,506	127,657	152,170
Victoria	6,866	3,973	94,393	105,234
Queensland	16,803	6,339	139,973	163,112
South Australia	3,940	2,053	41,861	47,852
Western Australia	4,496	2,413	55,507	62,417
Tasmania	290	670	17,515	18,473
Northern Territory	3,874	547	5,110	9,534
Australian Capital Territory	5,977	2,084	14,164	22,220
Australia(e)	60,286	24,581	496,276	581,139

Ref: 2021 Australian Census & AIHW Suicide Monitoring Reporting 1985 - 2020

# VETERAN GAMES' UNIQUE POINT OF DIFFERENCE & KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- 01** Designed to particularly attract 'younger' or 'contemporary' Veterans (aged 18-40) who the highest 'at-risk' demographic for mental health issues and suicidality per the research and key statistics highlighted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Interim Report,
- 02** Addresses key findings and recommendations pertinent to the ongoing mental health and suicide crisis within the current and former serving Veteran community, through innovative and enjoyable direct and indirect approaches,
- 03** Promotes and requires Veterans to connect and form their team of 8 (proactive mental health) [Community],
- 04** Promotes and requires Veterans to train with a purpose - to compete in the Veteran Games (proactive physical and mental health) [Purpose],
- 05** Promotes and requires Veterans to compete in events that celebrate their military identity (proactive physical and mental health) [Identity],
- 06** Provides and promotes opportunities for Veteran families and friends to attend, be involved and share through an experience focused event plan, also creating opportunities for greater community interaction including family connections,
- 07** Provides opportunities for wider Veteran business community, Ex-Service Organisations, Defence sector, Defence Recruiting and Australian Defence Force to collaborate and gain amplified exposure for other organisational / stakeholder objectives within a confined and focused period of time,
- 08** Annual scheduling will provide year-round community connection and training purpose for all current and former serving Veterans, further supporting Veteran self and community identity benefits (proactive mental and physical health),
- 09** Promotes and provides a positive Veteran narrative - celebrating the skills and experience of Veterans in a competitive forum that will be enjoyed and peak interest from the wider public,
- 10** Provides a year-round training & connection focus for Veterans, in particular during the period After ANZAC Day & prior to Remembrance Day,
- 11** Can be achieved at minimum or no cost to the Veteran competitors (dependent upon funding success eg. sponsorships, grants, year-on-year reinvestment),
- 12** Provides an opportunity for bi-partisan political support across all levels of government - focusing on purpose and the outcomes of the event throughout all phases,
- 13** Provides a catalyst for shifting Veteran Culture within Australia, that can also expand to reinforce this in-kind with our global allies.

# VETERAN GAMES' UNIQUE POINT OF DIFFERENCE & KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- 14** Provides opportunities for extensive Defence Recruitment activities - drawing on competitive attributes & publicly showcasing exciting elements of ADF service life & skills in a desirable format that can be broadcast through social & digital platforms (dependent on investment in this focus area),
- 15** Provides the opportunity for local and state try-out to be conducted via remote or a travelling 'road-show' that would again expand and increase the impact of designed proactive mental and physical health objective, as well as ADF and Defence Recruiting opportunities,
- 16** In line with the above, provides the 'test-case' opportunity for the development of a 'Veterans ID' card that would allow former serving Veterans access onto a military base for a specific time/activity (to conduct supervised tryouts), with the potential to expand this with subsequent 'sponsorship' of such base access by on-base units to support collaborative training leading up to the annual event,
- 17** 'Arena' styled format is easily observed, captured, streamed and/or broadcast in order to provide multiplied reach - bringing greater awareness and impact for all outcomes and objectives,
- 18** Focusing on a Team events construct is unique in comparison to the majority of other perceived like-for-like civilian or celebrity examples,
- 19** Can be scalable to facilitate decentralised local and state events year round, leading to a national finals,
- 20** Provides a proof of concept that is able to be replicated and scaled to other international locations - further multiplying the positive awareness and impact of the event objectives,
- 21** Provides a platform to attract celebrity & key stakeholder support, further multiplying the positive awareness & impact of the event objectives,
- 22** Provides a platform for expanded commercial opportunities including merchandise, media rights, brand collaborations, endorsements and showcasing stakeholder equities (foremost - Veteran support services, support networks and opportunities),
- 23** Provides and promotes opportunities for local businesses, organisations, community groups and suppliers to be involved in multiple elements of the event design and conduct,
- 24** Provides a finite focus with clear observable & accessible outcomes including participation, attendance, reach (digital) & feedback to be collected,
- 25** Provides a broad range of opportunities for study and research initiatives.

# OPERATIONS PLAN

## YEAR - 1

### Phase 1

01 FEB – APR Launch Event

- Branding,
- Website,
- Launch Event,
- PR & Media Planning,
- Founding Sponsors (up to \$1m),
- Event Organiser (experience contractor) scoping,
- Development of all internal comms (Veterans) ready to go out week prior to ANZAC Day),
- Engagement with Government (MINDEF, MIN VA) & QLD State,
- Engagement with ADF & Defence Recruiting,
- Scope for travelling road show (stakeholder approvals dependent),
- Insurances initial quote,
- Initial staffing budget and recruitment underway.

### Phase 2

Launch Event – EOFY 30 JUN

- Registrations campaign (internal comms),
- PR & Media Execution,
- Tiered Sponsorships open,
- Event Organiser selected,
- Ongoing Engagement with Federal & State Governments,
- Ongoing engagement with ADF & Defence Recruiting,
- Commencement of travelling Tryouts Roadshow (stakeholder approvals dependent),
- Insurances initial quote,
- Initial staffing budget and recruitment underway.

### Phase 3

01 JUL – 22 SEP

- Operational Structure confirmed,
- Tryouts Roadshow,
- Sponsor / partnership follow through,
- Merch confirmed,
- Team fundraisers commence,
- Ops Staffing confirmation & commencements,
- Concurrent confirmation of Venue for 2024 event (QLD),
- Composition of Plans (2024) team & commencement of governance,
- Insurance confirmation.

### Phase 4

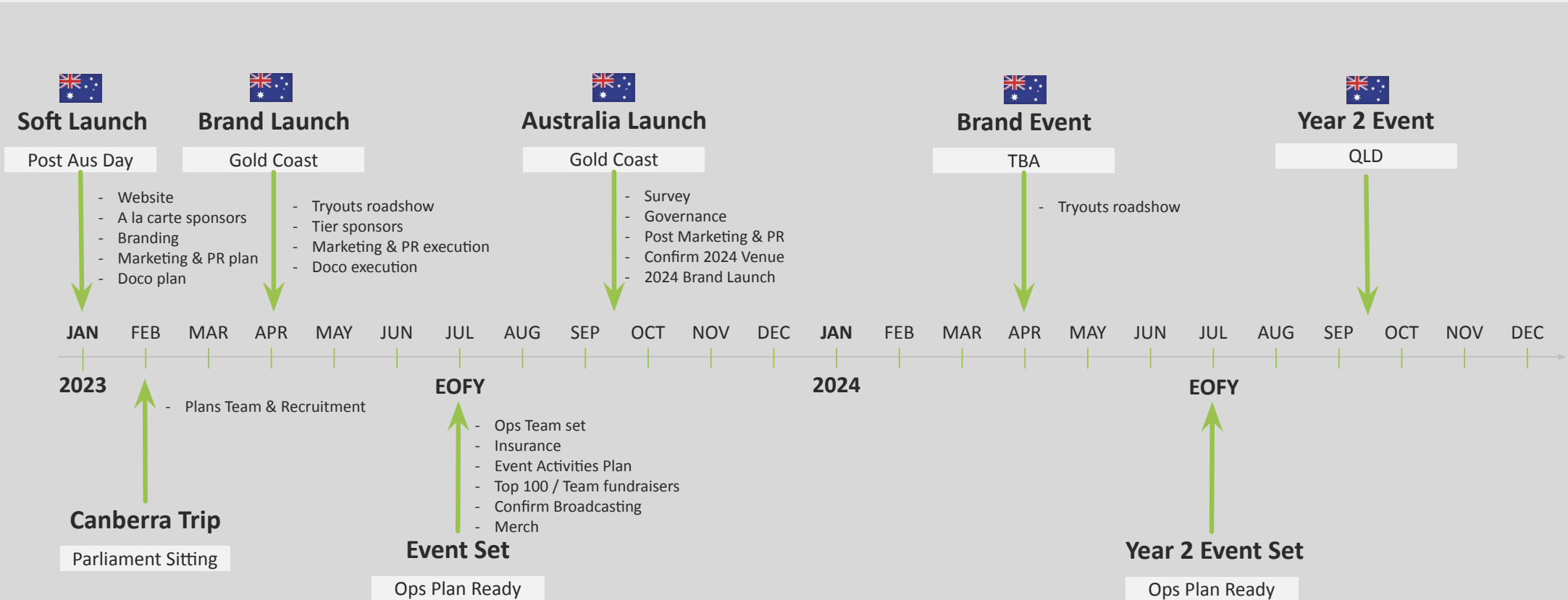
23 SEP – 07 OCT

- Bump-in & Rehearsals
- 29 SEP – 01 OCT (Heats)
- 02 OCT Finals)
- Broadcasting
- Social Events
- Events Village
- Sponsors / Corporate Sessions
- Bump-out & Refurb

Phase 5 - Survey, Disseminate and Amplify.

# TIMELINE - VETERAN GAMES AUSTRALIA

## TWO-YEAR ACTION PLAN



# FURTHER / FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- **DEFENCE RECRUITMENT INVOLVEMENT**
- **ADF INVOLVEMENT**
- **DOCUMENTARY / MINI SERIES PRODUCTION**
- **EVENT BROADCASTING / STREAMING**
- **MERCHANDISING**
- **NATIONAL SCALABILITY**
- **INTERNATIONAL SCALABILITY**





# WWW.VETERANGAMES.COM

“““

**“THE VETERAN GAMES CONCEPT HAS BEEN IN DEVELOPMENT SINCE IT WAS FIRST DECIDED THAT WE WOULD WITHDRAW OUR TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN IN 2021. THE VETERAN GAMES WILL PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR VETERANS FROM ALL OVER AUSTRALIA, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SERVICE OR DEPLOYMENT HISTORY, TO JOIN TOGETHER AND PUT THEIR SKILLS TO THE TEST.”**

HESTON RUSSELL, VSF & VETERAN GAMES FOUNDER.

**VETERAN GAMES**  
AUSTRALIA  
COMING SEPTEMBER 2023  
EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Select Option	
First Name	Last Name
Email	Mobile Number
State	Postcode
Are you a Veteran?	Additional Comments, if any.

**SUBMIT >**



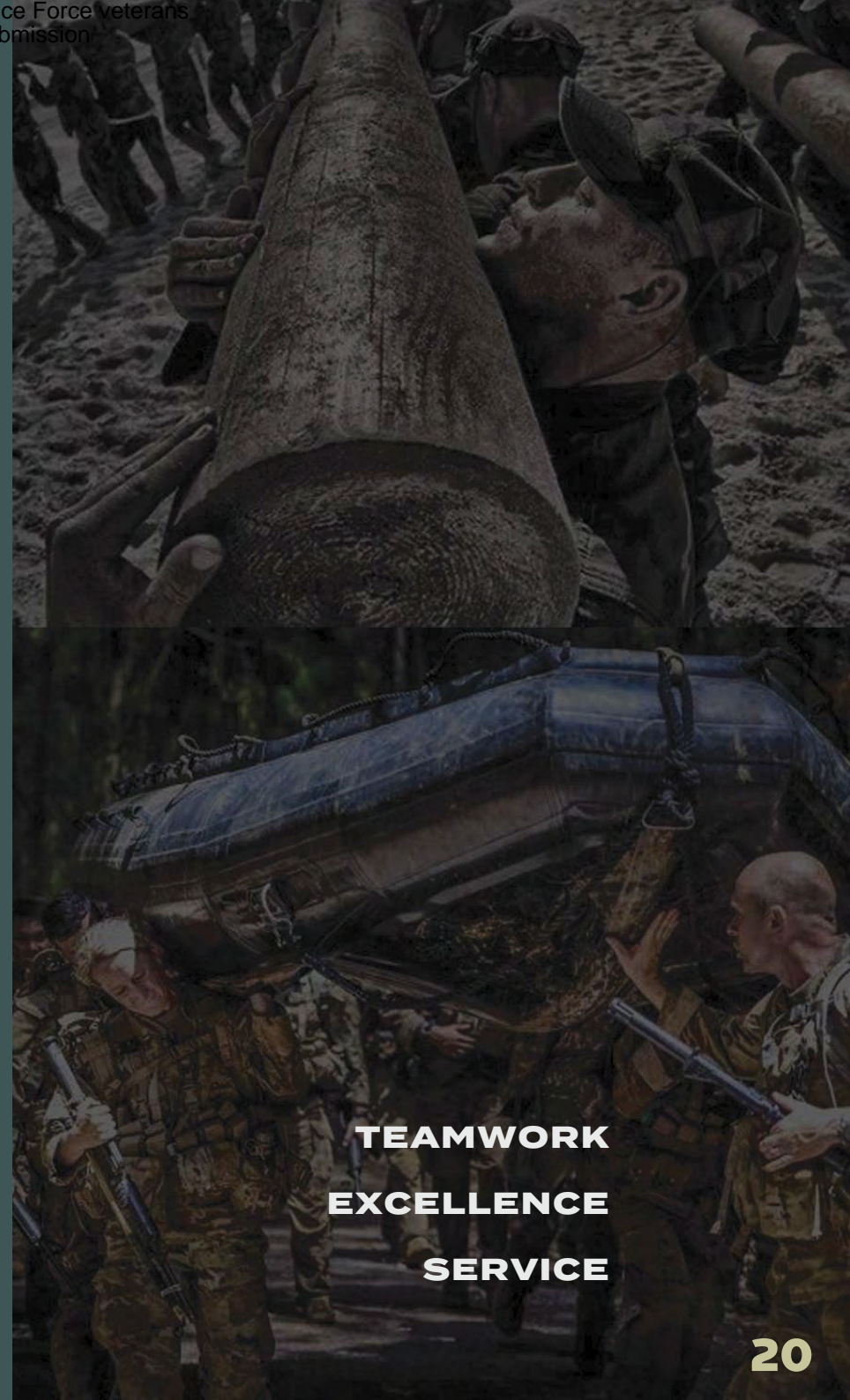
Veteran Games will celebrate & showcase the skills & excellence of our Veteran Community in a format that is exciting & engaging for the wider public. The preparations & conduct will provide proactive physical & mental health outcomes for all involved, while working to shape a positive & aspirational contemporary Veteran narrative & addressing key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Defence & Veteran Suicide Interim Report.

**THE VETERAN GAMES WILL DIRECTLY  
IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS  
OF THOUSANDS OF VETERANS & THEIR  
FAMILY MEMBERS ACROSS AUSTRALIA.**

**PURPOSE**

**COMMUNITY**

**IDENTITY**



**TEAMWORK  
EXCELLENCE  
SERVICE**

““““

**“BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH PURPOSE IS OUR PRIMARY  
FOCUS, BECAUSE THAT IS HOW WE BEST SUPPORT HEALTH AND  
WELLNESS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL.”**

- HESTON RUSSELL, VSF & VETERAN GAMES FOUNDER.

# VETERAN GAMES

AUSTRALIA



Veteran Support Force LTD, the registered Veterans mental health Charity with DGR status, will be the key support organisation in partnership with the City of Gold Coast for the conduct of the event. A separate organisation - Veteran Games - may be established closer to the event / FY 2023/2024.

## COMPANY OVERVIEW

The Veteran Support Force (VSF) is constituted to be a not-for-profit charity and a company limited by guarantee. VSF is an ACNC registered Charity with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status.

### Business Name

Veteran Support Force Ltd

### Domain Name

[www.VSF.org.au](http://www.VSF.org.au)

### Email

[hello@vsf.org.au](mailto:hello@vsf.org.au)

### ACN

651 240 989

### ABN

79 651 240 989

### Postal Address

Veteran Support Force  
PO Box 3217, Newstead  
QLD 4006



# VETERAN GAMES

AUSTRALIA

---

## CONTACT US

- +61 414 030 959
- HELLO@VSF.ORG.AU
- VETERANGAMES.COM

