

Veterans' Support Structures

- 9.1 The final Chapter acknowledges the many government, non-government, non-profit and ex-service organisations in Australia which support veterans, wounded and injured or otherwise, and specifically acknowledges their contribution to the Inquiry. It finishes by considering broad-scale coordination requirements for veteran services.
- 9.2 The Committee received evidence from a multitude of organisations, both public and private, which support our wounded and injured Australian Defence Force (ADF) members. The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (VVAA) noted the importance of support organisations, submitting that while the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) procedures for dealing with ongoing health care and support are adequate, a considerable degree of support and assistance is being sought from the ex-service and broader community. VVAA submitted that support organisations are well placed to provide such support, and can provide a buffer between ex-service personnel and the government bureaucracy that they are cautious of dealing with directly.¹

Support organisations

- 9.3 The Committee received submissions from a number of support organisations.

Australasian Services Care Network

- 9.4 Australasian Services Care Network (ASCN) is a 'community of practice' of Australasian providers of care and accommodation services, primarily to the Service and ex-Service community and their families. The group

1 Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia, *Submission 27*, p. 5.

was created following the inaugural Defence Community Forum in 2011, and provides a network for providers to share insights, create a unified 'voice', work collectively and collaborate, form public policy positions, work with other international ex-Service care provider bodies, and enhance outcomes for the Network and their beneficiaries. Membership is open to providers of care and accommodation services to the Service and ex-Service community of Australia and New Zealand.²

Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Mental Health

9.5 The Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) is a not-for-profit incorporated association, affiliated with the University of Melbourne's Department of Psychiatry, whose vision is improved wellbeing and quality of life for individuals and communities who experience trauma, with a particular focus on current and former members of the Defence community. It works to achieve this vision through an integrated model of provision of policy and service development advice, research, and education and training activities.³

Carry On (Victoria)

9.6 Carry On (Victoria) is an ex-service welfare organisation operating solely in Victoria and are a major supplier of welfare assistance to the Victorian ex-service community which predominantly provides low cost rental accommodation, mainly in rural cities; education assistance to children of veterans; and general welfare in the form of advice, guidance and financial assistance.⁴

Centori Pty Ltd

9.7 Centori is a privately owned and independent Australian adventure company creating opportunities to experience worldwide leisure and peak adventure travel for wounded soldiers amongst other groups. It offers activities ranging from high altitude climbing, bespoke trekking, endurance kayaking, walking safaris through big game areas of Africa, unique corporate Road Trips, to tailored travel covering Australian military history. The company made its name on the Kokoda Track, but now offers programs on every continent.⁵

2 Australasian Services Care Network, *Submission 39*, p. 1.

3 Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Mental Health, *Submission 23*, p. 1.

4 Carry On (Victoria), *Submission 10*, p. 1.

5 Centori, viewed 21 March 2013, <www.centori.com.au>.

Centre for Military and Veterans' Health

- 9.8 The Centre for Military and Veterans' Health (CMVH) is an internationally-unique academic, community and military partnership funded by the Departments of Defence (Defence) and Veterans' Affairs (DVA). CMVH have a team of researchers, health practitioners and serving ADF personnel who work together to better understand and address health issues affecting military personnel, veterans, and their families through: research; military-specific professional development opportunities for health professionals; and Think Tank Forums to provide opportunities for high-level strategic input to the military health debate.⁶

Defence Families of Australia

- 9.9 Defence Families of Australia (DFA) is a ministerially appointed group that specifically represents the views of Defence families. Its aim is to inform Government and Defence on the needs of the family. Its goal is to ensure quality of life for all Defence families by providing a recognised forum for their views, and by reporting, making recommendations and influencing policy that directly affects families, and in turn, enhancing the capability of the Defence Force.⁷

Go2 Human Performance

- 9.10 Go2 Human Performance assists people to alter limiting beliefs, increase confidence and develop mental fitness. Over 20 years, Go2 Human Performance's work and self-management programs claim to have assisted thousands of people including wounded and injured veterans change their lives and deal with most illnesses. Go2 Human Performance staff have a combination of professional backgrounds in the behavioural sciences and dynamic contemporary techniques.⁸

Legacy Australia

- 9.11 Legacy Australia (Legacy) is an organisation that began in the years after World War I and has as its role the support to the families of incapacitated and deceased veterans. Legacy cares for dependants of those who served their country; namely veterans who died (or were incapacitated) on

6 Centre for Military and Veterans' Health , viewed 21 May 2013, <www.cmvh.org.au>.

7 Defence Families of Australia, viewed 16 May 2013, <www.dfa.org.au>.

8 Go2 Human Performance, viewed 19 March 2013, <www.go2humanperformance.com.au>.

operational service or subsequently died as a result of their service.⁹ Mr Tony Ralph, President of Brisbane Legacy highlighted that:

Children [of fallen soldiers] will always be Legacy wards. We will always provide services to the children provided the mother and the children want them.¹⁰

Psychological Trauma Recovery Service

9.12 The Mental Health Clinical Service Unit (MHCSU) is one of several Clinical Service Units within Austin Health and comprises a range of mental health services including specialist and state-wide services including the Psychological Trauma Recovery Service (PTRS) which is Austin Health's specialist Mental Health Service for the treatment of Trauma-related Mental Health Disorders (TRMHDs).¹¹

Returned and Services League of Australia

9.13 The aims and objectives of the Returned and Services League (RSL) are to perpetuate the close ties of friendship created by mutual service in the ADF or allied forces, to maintain a proper standard of dignity and honour among all past and present serving members of the Defence Force and to set an example of public spirit and noble hearted endeavour. They do this in order to; preserve the memory and records of those who suffered and died for Australia; provide for the sick and wounded and needy among those who have served and their dependents including pensions, medical attention, homes and suitable employment; inculcate loyalty to the Nation, to guard the good name and preserve the interests and standing of members of the Defence Force; and to promote RSL policy on national questions.¹²

Soldier On

9.14 Soldier On is a charity supporting those who have been wounded on contemporary operations. The charity allows for the Australian community to connect to those that have been wounded and to support their re-integration back into Australian society through providing access to inspirational activities, supporting rehabilitation and providing opportunities that empower individuals.¹³

9 Legacy Australia Council, *Submission 12*, pp. 1, 6.

10 Mr Tony Ralph, President, Brisbane Legacy, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 20.

11 Austin Health, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

12 Returned and Services League of Australia, viewed 21 May 2013, <www.rsl.org.au>.

13 Soldier On, *Submission 15*, pp. 1-2

Toowong Private Hospital

9.15 Toowong Private Hospital (TPH) is recognised as Queensland's leading private mental health care facility and is seen as a specialist centre in veterans' mental health. The TPH Group Therapy Day Programs area has run outpatient cognitive behaviour therapy-based group therapy programs for currently serving ADF personnel and ex serving members with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Alcohol and Drug (A&D) addiction for the last 12 years and their programs are accredited by the ACPMH.¹⁴

Trauma Release Australia

9.16 Trauma Release Australia use trauma release exercises (TRE) in an approach that deliberately uses the body's innate process of involuntary shaking and tremors in a safe and controlled way to physically release the effects of chronic stress and unresolved trauma including PTSD.¹⁵

Veterans' Health Advisory Council

9.17 The Veterans' Health Advisory Council (VHAC) advises the South Australian Minister for Health and Ageing, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Defence Industries and Veterans' Affairs on the health issues of veterans, war widows and their families and advocates on their behalf.¹⁶

Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia

9.18 The aim of the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia is to assist all veterans, dependants and their descendants in all matters relating to their health, welfare and wellbeing.¹⁷

Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia

9.19 The Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia (VVFA) and its affiliated partners, the Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia (VPPAA), are dedicated to the welfare of all service and ex-service personnel and their families. VVFA is made up of volunteers who chose to help veterans in need.¹⁸

14 Dr Andrew Khoo, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

15 Trauma Release Australia, viewed 21 May 2013, <www.traumareleaseexercises.com.au>.

16 Veterans' Health Advisory Council, viewed 21 May 2013, <www.sahealth.sa.gov.au>.

17 Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia, viewed 21 May 2013, <www.vvaa.org.au>.

18 Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia, viewed 21 May 2013, <www.vvfagraville.org>.

Young Diggers

- 9.20 Young Diggers is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing on-line care and welfare to all serving and ex-serving military personnel and their families. Young Diggers operate in association with the Goodna RSL sub-branch and services club, but remain independent in operation.
- 9.21 When contacted, Young Diggers communicates with the person and when they are ready, refers them to the appropriate people like the Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service (VVCS), a pensions officer in their area, or other appropriate support services. Young Diggers provide a confidential service, a non-military organisation who understands, a non-government organisation that can be trusted, easy to talk to ex-military volunteers who have 'been there', and a voice, in a safe environment, where veterans can share their feelings and experiences with others.¹⁹

Gaps and overlap

- 9.22 Mr Tony Ralph, the President of Brisbane Legacy, told the Committee that the primary agencies, Defence and DVA, focus on the veteran and it is left to organisations such as Legacy to support families. He suggested that if Defence and DVA engaged with organisations such as Legacy at a very early stage, it would be a more holistic experience for the member and their family and that the support of Legacy and other organisations could become more compatible with that of the larger organisations.²⁰
- 9.23 When he was asked about the formation of Soldier On and if it was the result of some perceived deficiency in the way that Defence and DVA were providing support to veterans, Professor Peter Leahy AC responded:
- It is very much an extra. We do not think there is a deficiency. When you look at the sum total that is available – the RSL are doing great work, Legacy is doing great work, and there are some other charities starting out there.²¹
- 9.24 Professor Leahy went on to say that Soldier On is conscious that there are different structures and organisations providing support to wounded and injured veterans. Soldier On is therefore actively consulting with larger support organisations to ensure that they are not 'treading in someone

19 Young Diggers, viewed 20 March 2013, <www.youngdiggers.com.au>.

20 Mr Tony Ralph, President Brisbane Legacy, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 16.

21 Professor Peter Leahy AC, Chairman Soldier On, *Committee Hansard*, 27 November 2012, p. 2.

else's lane' or 'duplicating work and effort'. He also noted that support arrangements varied from state to state.²²

- 9.25 When asked about coordination of services, Mr Brian Freeman, the Director of Centori Pty Ltd, told the Committee that sometimes there might be some niche areas in the marketplace which 'put the horse before the cart' rather than delivering a solution. Nonetheless he did not think that collaboration is as important now as it might have been in the past, particularly since RSL Queensland had committed to providing funding and coordination. He submitted that organisations supporting wounded and injured provide their services in different areas. He did say, however, if they were to all come together, they would be a more powerful entity than they are individually.²³
- 9.26 The President of Young Diggers Australia, Mr John Jarrett, gave evidence that there are a lot of organisations assisting veterans with, for example, welfare and DVA claims:
- There are lots of ex-service organisations that are able to give the same advice and do the same DVA claims, as long as they are up with all the legislation.²⁴
- 9.27 Mr Tony McHugh, the Manager and Principal Psychologist with PTRS, gave evidence that, even in the Vietnam era, due to the large number of well-motivated and well-intentioned returning Vietnam veterans, there were multiple organisations attempting to represent them. He highlighted that now there are even more organisations for recently returned veterans but advised the Committee that the uptake of membership is not great.²⁵
- 9.28 The Committee notes that this aligns with DVA's assessment of the current cohort of veterans; that they tend not to join groups.
- 9.29 Carry On (Victoria) gave a somewhat grimmer observation. Mrs Cheryl Hersey, Carry On's Welfare Officer, told the Committee candidly that there is a gap between an individual transitioning out of the Services and eventually seeking assistance.²⁶

22 Professor Peter Leahy AC, Chairman Soldier On, *Committee Hansard*, 27 November 2012, pp. 5, 7.

23 Mr Brian Freeman, Director, Centori Pty Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 25 March 2013, p. 9.

24 Mr Mervyn (John) Jarrett, President Young Diggers, *Committee Hansard*, 25 March 2013, pp. 21, 22.

25 Mr Tony McHugh, Manager and Principal Psychologist, Austin Health Psychological Trauma Recovery Service, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 7.

26 Mrs Cheryl Hersey, Welfare Officer, Carry On (Victoria), *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 24.

On-line support

- 9.30 Mr Ralph highlighted the importance of support organisations having an on-line internet presence, especially for the people associated with the current cohort of veterans.²⁷ This also aligns with DVA's assessment.
- 9.31 Likewise, DFA highlighted the importance of embracing social media to advise families of the wounded and injured on support services available to them, and of providing this information to families when a member is discharged from hospital.²⁸

Coordination

- 9.32 Associate Professor Malcolm Hopwood, the Clinical Director of PTRS, gave evidence that the contemporary veteran cohort, including Afghanistan, Iraq and East Timor and the various recent peace-keeping missions, do not generally have close links to the ex-service organisations. He advised that while there are some ex-service organisations specifically representing that group, there has not been a single body emerge with which the contemporary cohort identify. He believed that there will never be universal identification with a specific organisation and that it is unfortunate, because one of the purposes that the ex-service organisations serve is often as a pathway to support a veteran accessing mental health care and that that is a concern.
- 9.33 He gave evidence that a veteran is more likely to approach an organisation that 'culturally makes sense' to that individual and that for the contemporary veteran, 'the RSL's for older guys'.²⁹
- 9.34 Soldier On's Executive Officer, Mr Simon Bloomer, told the Committee that interactions between ex-service organisations was cooperative and that there was no rivalry 'whatsoever'. He went on to note that Victoria appears to be far better served by such organisations than other states and that, particularly in Queensland but possibly also in other states, the RSL 'did more to fill the gaps'.³⁰
- 9.35 DFA submitted that a common complaint from Defence families is that there are many departments and support services available and that as a
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27 Mr Tony Ralph, President, Brisbane Legacy, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 21.

28 Defence Families of Australia, *Submission 8*, pp. 2-3.

29 Associate Professor Malcolm Hopwood, Clinical Director, Austin Health Psychological Trauma Recovery Service, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 6.

30 Mr Simon Bloomer, Executive Officer Carry On (Victoria), *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 25.

result, family members often lack awareness and clarity regarding support structures. DFA advocated a single, recognisable service centre to coordinate health and social support services.³¹

- 9.36 Professor Sandy McFarlane AO told the Committee that the element that was missing in the national health care framework, particularly with respect to mental health, is a national 'commission of mental health' with oversight to critique and identify the adequacy of services. Professor McFarlane argued that the risks of neglecting the needs of current and ex-serving members of the Defence Force are magnified by the multiplicity of jurisdictions that are involved in their care.³²
- 9.37 Associate Professor Susan Neuhaus CSC gave evidence that the provision of support for some individuals have fallen in the gaps between agencies rather than being appropriately managed across agencies. She echoed Professor McFarlane, believing that there is a need for a peak body or an advisory board with a governance framework that sits above the various support agencies to align and manage veteran support appropriately and to ensure that that the whole space is managed effectively.³³

Volunteerism

- 9.38 The Director of Carry On (Victoria), Mr Alistair Robb foreshadowed that perhaps in the not-so-distant future, because of the evolutionary nature of ex-service organisations, organisations like Carry On (Victoria) will eventually run out of people to run them because of the diminishing veteran community and that they may have to hire salaried staff to do the work of the current volunteers.³⁴
- 9.39 Dr Glen Edwards submitted that volunteers are a much needed addition to services in assisting ADF and ex-service personnel, however they too need assistance.³⁵

Committee comment

- 9.40 All of these organisations do important and valuable work supporting the rehabilitation of ADF personnel wounded or injured on operations and
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31 Defence Families of Australia, *Submission 8*, p. 3.

32 Professor Alexander (Sandy) McFarlane AO, *Committee Hansard*, 8 February 2013, p. 1.

33 Associate Professor Susan Neuhaus CSC, *Committee Hansard*, 8 February 2013, p. 18.

34 Mr Alistair Robb, Director, Carry On (Victoria), *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2012, p. 24.

35 Dr Glen Edwards, *Submission 34*, p. 2.

thanks them for their contribution to the Inquiry. The Committee extends its unreserved thanks to these organisations, and the broader support community, and recommends them to Australia's wounded and injured veterans.

- 9.41 The Committee notes that some organisations like Soldier On are de-conflicting with other agencies to ensure that there is no overlap between support organisations. The Committee remains concerned that not every support organisation is so diligent and believes that there is potentially a need for a representative council, peak body or an advisory board to increase visibility of effort and coordination between the various support agencies. The primary aim of such a body would be to identify service gaps.
- 9.42 The Committee feels that an undercurrent of volunteerism remains healthy in Australia, and with a new cohort of veterans, there will likely be an ongoing pool of volunteers, ex-servicemen or otherwise. The Committee encourages volunteerism but does not wish to impose Governmental restriction on the services provided by such organisations.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the Government commission an independent assessment of the need for, and establish if warranted, an appropriate national/state-based veterans' organisation coordination body.

Senator Mark Furner
Chair
Defence Sub-Committee
June 2013

Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
June 2013