

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

3.97 The committee recommends, that in the context of recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare findings concerning veterans at risk of suicide, the Australian Government:

- develop and implement specific suicide prevention programs targeted at those veterans identified in at-risk groups; and
- expand the DVA Reconnects Project to proactively contact veterans in these identified in at-risk groups.

Recommendation 2

3.99 The committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent study into the mental health impacts of compensation claim assessment processes on veterans engaging with the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation. The results of this research should be utilised to improve compensation claim processes.

Recommendation 3

3.102 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a National Veteran Suicide Register to be maintained by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Recommendation 4

3.104 The committee recommends that the Australian Government review the enhancement of veteran-specific online training programs intended for mental health professionals. In particular:

- requirements for providers to undertake training;
- the introduction of incentives for undertaking online training and demonstrating outcomes in clinical practice.

Recommendation 5

3.106 The committee recommends that Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs align arrangements for the provision of professional mental health care.

Recommendation 6

4.85 The committee recommends that the Australian Government make a reference to the Productivity Commission to simplify the legislative framework of compensation and rehabilitation for service members and veterans. In particular, this review should examine the utilisation of Statements of Principle in the determination of compensation claims. The report of this systemic review should be completed within 18 months and tabled in the Parliament.

Recommendation 7

5.99 The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to support the 'Veteran Centric Reform' program within the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Recommendation 8

5.101 The committee recommends that, while the Veteran Centric Reform program is being implemented, the Australian Government continue to fund measures to:

- alleviate pressure on claims processing staff and to reduce the backlog of claims; and
- increase case coordination staff to assist clients with complex needs.

Recommendation 9

5.103 The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs conduct a review of its training program to ensure relevant staff:

- have an understanding of the realities of military service;
- have an understanding of health issues of veterans;
- have appropriate communication skills to engage with clients with mental health conditions; and
- have sufficient training to interpret medical assessment and reports.

Recommendation 10

5.105 The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs review its use of medico-legal firms in relation to the assessment of the conditions of veterans. In particular, this review should confirm:

- assessments undertaken are appropriate to the conditions considered;
- that the medical professionals used have undertaken training on treating veterans and can demonstrate their expertise working amongst this client group; and
- the need for independent medical assessments where information is already available from the veteran's own doctor or treating specialist.

Recommendation 11

5.107 The committee recommends the Department of Veterans' Affairs expand its online engagement with younger veterans through social media to raise awareness regarding available support services.

Recommendation 12

5.113 The committee recommends that the reference to the Productivity Commission should also include examination of the following areas in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio:

- governance arrangements;

- administrative processes; and
- service delivery.

Recommendation 13

5.115 The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office commence the proposed performance audit of the 'Efficiency of veterans' service delivery by the Department of Veterans' Affairs' as soon as possible.

Recommendation 14

6.95 The committee recommends that Transition Taskforce examine and address:

- any gaps in medical services or income support for veterans in transition or immediately following transition;
- barriers to employment for veterans who are transitioning such as workers' insurance issues and civilian recognition of qualifications, skills and training; and
- disincentives for veterans to undertake work or study resulting from the legislative or policy frameworks of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Recommendation 15

6.99 The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs develop a two-track transition program for serving members leaving the ADF. Those identified as being in 'at risk' groups or requiring additional assistance due to their circumstances should be able to access intensive transition services. These intensive transition services should include additional support:

- claims case management;
- healthcare, mental health and wellbeing support;
- employment assistance programs;
- social connectedness programs; and
- health and wellbeing programs.

Recommendation 16

6.102 The committee recommends the Australian Government issue all ADF members transitioning into civilian life with a DVA White Card.

Recommendation 17

6.104 The committee recommends that the Career Transition Assistance Scheme include an option for veterans to undertake a period of work experience with an outside employer.

Recommendation 18

6.106 The committee recommends that the Australian Public Service Commission conduct a review into mechanisms to further support veteran employment in the Australian Public Service and the public sector.

Recommendation 19

6.109 The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs review the support for partners of veterans to identify further avenues for assistance. This review should include services such as information and advice, counselling, peer support and options for family respite care to support partners of veterans.

Recommendation 20

7.73 The committee recommends:

- the Australian Government expand the Veterans and Community Grants program to support the provision of alternative therapies to veterans with mental health conditions; and
- the Department of Veterans' Affairs consult with ex-service organisations and the veteran community regarding avenues to reform the Veterans and Community Grants program to support the provision of alternative therapies to veterans.

Recommendation 21

7.75 The committee recommends the Australian Government fund a trial program that would provide assistance animals for veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) stemming from their military service in order to gather research to support the eventual funding of animals for veterans with PTSD and/or other mental health conditions through the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Recommendation 22

7.79 The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to support the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service:

- create and maintain a public database of services available to veterans; and
- provide an information service to assist veterans and families connect and access appropriate services provided by ex-service organisations and others.

Recommendation 23

7.84 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a Bureau of Veterans' Advocates to represent veterans, commission legal representation where required, train advocates for veterans and be responsible for advocate insurance issues.

Recommendation 24

7.87 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an independent review of the representation of veterans before the Veterans' Review Board. This review should assess whether the rights of vulnerable veterans are being adequately protected and whether further support mechanisms for veterans appearing before the Veterans' Review Board are required.