



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Minister for Defence Personnel

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC

MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMUNITY AND PEER PROGRAM TO HELP VULNERABLE AUSTRALIAN VETERANS

FOLLOWING the success of a two-year *Community and Peer* Pilot in Townsville, the Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling will now roll-out their *Community and Peer Program* across Australia, Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said today.

“The Government is putting veterans and their families first and is committed to ensuring that they have access to the mental health support they need,” Mr Chester said.

“The primary aim of the Townsville *Community and Peer* Pilot was to enhance the management of complex and high-risk clients in the region, particularly those vulnerable individuals considered to be at risk of suicide.

“The Pilot demonstrated that ‘lived experience’ mental health peer workers within Open Arms could enhance the management of vulnerable clients.

“Some veterans are reluctant to reach out for help because they are unable to get over the stigma of seeking professional mental health treatment.

“Peers often have a good understanding of the challenges and issues they face, and can help provide a bridge between the veteran community and professional mental health support.

“Rolling out the *Community and Peer Program* across Australia will provide a new pathway for clients who were previously unlikely to consider accessing or being referred to Open Arms services.

Mr Patrick McGurrin, Chief Executive of Townsville Private Hospital, said “A peer support can connect with vulnerable individuals on a more personal level than traditional mental health support, this can result in more timely and comprehensive care being provided by specialist mental health services to those in need”.

The *Community and Peer* program also assist individuals and families who are currently accessing Open Arms services to connect to other services and initiatives in the veteran community. The Open Arms Peers also support a regional peer network coordinating mentoring and training for other peers working with the veteran community.

The *Community and Peer* program will be rolling out to all states and territories throughout 2019.

If you would like to know more about the Community and Peer Program visit the Open Arms website – www.OpenArms.gov.au

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