



## **The Hon Darren Chester MP**

Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel

Tuesday 25 June 2019

### **VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT TO INFORM GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY**

Tomorrow's Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit will bring together key stakeholders at Parliament House to improve services and support to those who have served in the Australian Defence Force.

The Summit, to be chaired by Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel, Darren Chester, will focus on extra steps that can be taken to improve veterans' mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention.

"As a Federal Government, we are determined to put veterans and their families first, which is why I'm convening the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit this Wednesday," Mr Chester said.

"It's an opportunity to take stock of current programs and assess what else can be done to improve mental wellbeing of veterans.

"While we have already expanded access to free counselling, and introduced new payments to ensure veterans submitting mental health claims have financial support while their claims are being considered, it's important to constantly assess the Government's strategy."

Experts will be brought together to consider the current range of services, programs and pilots offered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and to give advice about the strengths of current settings, where gaps could be addressed, and to inform the Government's forward plan and strategy.

The Summit will be the first stage of a structured engagement with ex-service organisations, veterans, families and service providers, over the coming months and will be a great opportunity for stakeholders to continue working with the Federal Government on veteran matters of great importance.

"I will also be working through the Government's approach to veteran's mental health and well-being with my Federal Ministerial colleagues," Mr Chester said.

"State and Territory Governments also have a vital role to play and mental health will be a focus at the Veterans Ministers Council meeting in August.

“The Prime Minister has made it clear that mental health will be a core focus of this government and he has already announced several initiatives aimed at suicide prevention and mental wellbeing in the wider community.

“It is a sad and complex issue which costs Australia more than 3000 people each year and when it comes to veteran suicide, the only acceptable number for me is zero – the only acceptable number for the Australian people is zero.

“We need to keep working together to improve mental wellbeing and prevent suicide throughout Australia.”

Free and confidential help is available through Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling, for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 by calling 1800 011 046.

**ENDS**

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