# The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

## MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 27 August 2020

## WELCOME STEP TOWARDS SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL AND VETERANS

LEGISLATION introduced today by the Attorney-General is a significant step forward in the establishment of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention — a powerful new independent and enduring body focused on understanding and addressing the risk factors of defence force and veteran suicide.

This legislation will formally create the National Commissioner position and sets out the National Commissioner's functions and powers. The National Commissioner will have powers to inquire fully into deaths by suicide among Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and veterans.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said suicide prevention was one of the Government's highest priorities, including when it came to the men and women who serve or have served in the nation's defence force.

"Each year, too many of our fellow Australians take their own lives, and the defence and veteran community are not immune. The death of a current or former ADF member is tragic and it is felt deeply by their family, friends, colleagues and ex-service community," Mr Chester said.

"It is absolutely critical that we try to understand all the factors connected to suicide and strive to build a better system of support to ensure our ADF personnel and veterans have the help they need, when and where they need it.

"There is no single solution to this complex issue and suicide prevention deserves an enduring focus. Today's announcement is about having a permanent, dedicated Commissioner who is focused on making inquiries and hearing from families, to prevent future suicides."

The legislation will provide the National Commissioner with powers broadly equivalent to a Royal Commission to undertake broad ranging inquiries relevant to their role and hear from any relevant party including ADF members, veterans and their families; conduct public and private hearings; and compel the production of evidence and summons witnesses.

Today also marks the start of a four-week public consultation period on the legislation, giving the general public the opportunity to review, and provide comment on, the draft Bill.

"I encourage our Defence personnel, veterans, their families, and anyone with an interest in how the National Commissioner will conduct its inquiries, to review the legislation and make a submission to the Attorney-General's Department," Mr Chester said.

*Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit [www.OpenArms.gov.au](www.OpenArms.gov.au)*

"The Government is committed to ensuring serving ADF members, veterans and their families have access to the right support, at the right time, especially those who are vulnerable or at risk.

"I want to assure defence and veterans' families that help is available now and can make a difference. Current serving members can access support through their local Garrison Health Centre or by contacting the All Hours Support Line available 24/7 on 1800 628 036. Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling provides support and counselling to current ADF members, veterans and their families and can be contacted 24/7 on 1800 011 046.

"Those who wish to remain anonymous can also contact Safe Zone Support on 1800 142 072. This is a free and anonymous counselling line established for veterans and their families who may have concerns about anonymity."

For more information about the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, including how to make a submission on the legislation, visit www.ag.gov.au

**ENDS**

<div align="center">

**MEDIA CONTACTS:**
**Rachel Tharratt: 02 6277 7820**
**DVA Media: 02 6289 6466**


**Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Canberra ACT.**

</div>