



Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Newsletter

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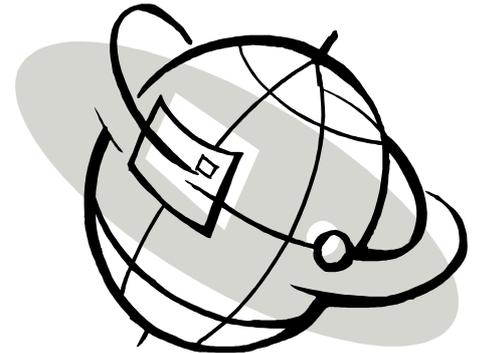
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Themes for Consultation

Last updated: 19 April 2021

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Terms of Reference will be determined in consultation with the defence and veteran community and states and territories. We expect that it will cover the following themes:

- Systemic issues and analysis of the contributing risk factors relevant to defence and veteran death by suicide, including:
 - Contribution of pre-service, service (including training), transition and post-service issues
 - The relevance of issues such as service, posting history and rank of the defence member or veteran
 - The manner of the recruitment of the person into the Australian Defence Force
 - The manner in which a person transitioned from the Australian Defence Force
 - The availability, quality and effectiveness of health, wellbeing and support services
 - How information about individuals is shared by and within the government.
 - How matters of individuals' mental and physical health are captured during enlistment and during and after service.
 - The quality and availability of support services for families, friends and colleagues affected by



a defence and veteran death by suicide.

- The risk factors of defence members and veterans who have attempted or contemplated suicide or have other lived experiences of suicide.
 - The protective and rehabilitative factors for defence members and veterans who have attempted or contemplated suicide or have other lived experiences of suicide.
 - The engagement of defence members and veterans with Commonwealth, State or Territory Governments about support services, claims or entitlements.
- The Royal Commission will be asked to make any recommendations, including recommendations about any policy, legislative, administrative or structural reforms.
- The Royal Commission will be asked to have regard to:
- Previous relevant reports and inquiries.
 - The work of the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.
 - The support available to members and veterans of other defence forces, particularly in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.
 - The role of government and non-government organisations

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- Support services for families and others impacted by defence and veteran death by suicide Opportunities to promote the understanding of suicide risks and protective factors in the defence and general community.

The Royal Commission will not be required to inquire into matters that it is satisfied have been dealt with by other inquiries, investigations or criminal or civil proceedings. Further, it will not be required to inquire into matters that it is satisfied have been dealt with by other inquiries, investigations or criminal or civil proceedings. Further, it will not be required to make findings of civil or criminal wrongdoing or findings about individual defence and veteran deaths by suicide.

The Royal Commission will be asked to focus on systemic issues, recognising that they will be informed by individual experiences and may need to make referrals to appropriate authorities.

The Royal Commission will be asked to recognise that its inquiries, including its findings and recommendations, will provide a foundation for the future work of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.

Message from DVA Secretary – 27th April 2021

The consultation on the Terms of Reference for this Royal Commission must clearly engage with all veterans and families and the broader community, which is why Minister Chester is leading consultation with the defence and Veteran's community.

Since the announcement of the Royal Commission on 19 April, the Department has been able to engage with thousands of veterans through the e-News, letters to all Committee Chairs, Presidents of ex-service organisations asking them to communicate with members, all State and Territory Ministers, all State and Territory officials responsible for veterans matters, all providers who are known to DVA. In addition, the department has scheduled and is scheduling workshops with interested veterans and families and the Minister has commenced roundtables during visits.

At this stage there have been over 2700 hits on the DVA Royal Commission site. Over 140 emails have been received in relation to the Terms of Reference.

Consultation on Terms of Reference for a Royal Commission are ordinarily coordinated through the responsible Minister's department.

This ensures the stakeholders at the centre of this Royal Commission are identified using existing networks to inform the issues for consideration by this nationally significant inquiry.

DVA does not 'filter' submissions received. DVA administers the site to receive submission.

DVA does not write the TOR.

The Royal Commission is independent of DVA and Defence.

On 13 March 2019, Minister Fletcher announced the public consultation for the Disability Royal Commission terms of reference, which was facilitated by the Department of Social Service.

Minister Fletcher's department was well positioned to use its existing networks to develop appropriate mechanisms for engaging as widely as possible with the target audience throughout the consultation process *[for example, DSS translated fact sheets about the terms of reference into 12 languages, including Auslan, and an Easy Read versions.*

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Previous consultation examples:

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Engagement with the consultation process through the Department of Social Services generated strong results, receiving 3,737 submissions.

Similarly, the Department of Health undertook consultation to develop the detailed terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and received more than 5,000 submissions from aged care consumers, families, carers, aged care workers, health professionals and providers.

This Royal Commission is a once in a century opportunity to look at how we can reduce the incidents of suicide in our community. It just makes sense for the responsible Minister (and his department) to invite comments on the draft themes/TOR. If we don't get on and lead the consultation, then we won't have the wider voice needed to ensure the TOR are reflective of the entire community.

- We may have different perspectives but we all share the same aim – to reduce veteran and defence suicide.
- This is your Royal Commission – it is your opportunity to be heard on this issue.
- The Royal Commission is independent from the Departments of Defence or Veterans' Affairs (DVA).
 - While DVA is collecting feedback on the terms of reference, this will all be provided to the Attorney-General's Department, which drafts the terms of reference.
 - DVA has no influence over the terms of reference, or the make-up or running of the Royal Commission. It is completely independent.
- Help guide what the Royal Commission will cover and report on.
- Have your say now – give your input on the terms of reference for the Royal Commission on this website: www.dva.gov.au/public-consultation-inform-terms-reference-royal-commission-defence-and-veteran-suicide
- You can provide input on the terms of reference until 21 May 2021.

More information

- The website includes the themes which are proposed to guide the terms of reference. You can comment on any or all of them.
- Please do not send personal stories or experiences to the consultation at this time. The Office of the National Commissioner is continuing to hear stories from families, serving and ex-serving members who have been affected by deaths by suicide. See the Office's website for more information (nationalcommissionerdvsp.gov.au).
- For anyone who is struggling, mental health support is available 24/7. Please reach out to:
 - Veterans and families - Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling on 1800 011 046 or www.openarms.gov.au
 - Serving ADF members and their families - All-hours Support Line on 1800 628 036
 - Community members
 - Lifeline on 13 11 12 or visit their website www.lifeline.org.au
 - Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or visit their website www.beyondblue.org.au



Liz Cosson AM CSC
Secretary
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Royal Commission Terms of Reference Consultation 2021 Calendar

- 27th April – Shepparton RSL engagement
- 29th April – Veterans' Family Advocate Families Forum – Brisbane (0930 & 1300)
- 29th April – Younger Veterans' Forum teleconference (1030-1200)
- 29th April – Qld Deputy Commissioner's Forum (1400)
- 30th April – Female Veterans' Forum (virtual)
- 30th April – SA Deputy Commissioner's Forum (1030)

- 03rd May – ACT Deputy Commissioner's Forum(online) (1430)
- 04th May – Vic Deputy Commissioner's Forum (0930)
- 05th May – WA Deputy Commissioner's Forum (1000)
- 05th May – NSW Deputy Commissioner's Forum (1100)
- 05th May – NT Deputy Commissioner's Forum (TBC)
- 05th May – Minister SA Edinburgh 7RAR, RAAF Inverbrackie/Woodside Daw Park
- 06th May – Minister SA
- 07th May – Veterans' Family Advocate Families Forum Perth
- 07th May – Minister SA

- 21st May – End of ToR Consultation

Monday 19 April 2021

Joint Media release — Establishment of a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

The death of any Australian Defence Force member or veteran is one death too many and a tragedy that is deeply felt by all Australians. Tragically, and heartbreakingly, this includes death by suicide.

Recognising this, the Government will take the step of recommending to the Governor-General the establishment of a Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide, following a period of consultation on draft Terms of Reference, with the relevant community and state and territory governments.

The Royal Commission will complement the Government's existing initiative to establish a permanent National Commission to proactively deal with future issues, including taking on other recommendations of a Royal Commission.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Royal Commission will be set up after listening to community calls for a national inquiry focusing on the systemic issues faced by Australian Defence Force members and veterans that too often results in their loss of life to suicide.

“Suicide prevention is a key priority for the Federal Government,” the Prime Minister said.

“We have always recognised that the rate of suicide of Australian Defence Force members and veterans is unacceptably high,” the Prime Minister said.

“In recognising the sacrifices made by our serving and former members and their families on behalf of the nation, we owe it to members, veterans and their families to continue to take action.”

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said the Royal Commission was another step in our efforts to build confidence, trust and hope for current and future veterans and their families that they will be supported.

“This will provide an opportunity for us all to reset, further increase our understanding of this issue, and unite the Parliament, the ex-service community, and the families who have been affected by suicide,” Minister Chester said.

“As a nation we take great pride in the men and women who have served our nation in uniform, and as a Government we have committed to help them with any mental or physical issues that are a result of that service.”

The Attorney-General, Michaelia Cash said the Attorney-General's Department will provide administrative support to the Royal Commission.”

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"Reducing lives lost to suicide is a priority for the Morrison Government."

"Our aim for this Royal Commission is that it will shed light on the critical steps we need to take so that we can reduce these heartbreaking cases of suicide."

Crucially, the Royal Commission will not defer, delay or limit, in any way, any proposed or announced policy, legislation or regulation that we are currently implementing.

The Government intends that the Royal Commission and the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention will be established together and operate in a complementary way to achieve long-term change.

The Royal Commission will look at past deaths by suicide (including suspected suicides and lived experience of suicide risks) from a systemic point of view, while the National Commissioner will have a forward-looking role, including overseeing the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

The National Commissioner Bill currently before the Parliament will be amended to ensure their work complements the work of the Royal Commission and examines deaths by suicide in the defence and veteran community that occur after the Royal Commission has handed down their final report.

Given the complex issues for consideration, and the importance of hearing from Australian Defence Force members, veterans and their families, the Government envisages that three Commissioners will be needed to lead the inquiry. Consultation is underway to appoint these candidates.

Minister Chester will lead a public consultation process on the draft Terms of Reference and the Prime Minister will write to First Ministers inviting their contributions to the draft Terms of Reference with the view of a joint Commonwealth-State Royal Commission.

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring all the systems of support for our veterans and their families are working together, and importantly that when someone who may be struggling reaches out for help, which we are there to support them.

[ENDS]

Wednesday 21 April 2021

'Have your say': Veterans' Minister

The Federal Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Darren Chester is urging the military community to 'have your say' on the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Mr Chester is visiting Townsville for two days as part of consultation with veterans, family members, service personnel and ex-service organisations.

"As Australia's largest garrison town, Townsville is the right place to commence consultation with the broader military community," Mr Chester said.

"The Member for Herbert Phillip Thompson has invited me here to meet with veterans and their families to discuss the Royal Commission and other significant issues.

"Phil has been very active in promoting the interests of veterans in his community and I look forward to listening to locals on this visit.

"Any member of the community or any organisation across Australia is able to provide input regarding the broad themes for the Terms of Reference announced this week."

Mr Chester said the Royal Commission was a chance to unite the veteran community and build on other measures which have been put in place to support veterans and their families.

"We have a world-class system of support for veterans and their families and Australians can be proud of the fact that \$11.5 billion in taxpayers' money will be provided this year to allow the Department of Veterans' Affairs to do its work," Mr Chester said.

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“There’s an enormous amount of help available through DVA, ex-service organisations and community groups which is making a difference every day.

“But the system isn’t perfect and the Royal Commission is an opportunity to identify any weaknesses, listen to the ideas of Australians, and implement changes that can help to save lives.”

Support for veterans and their families is available free of charge through the Open Arms counselling service on 1800 011 046.

ENDS

Wednesday 21 April 2021

Consultation open for Royal Commission

VETERANS and their families, ex-service organisations, states and territories, peak bodies and other interested stakeholders are being encouraged to provide their input for the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide announced yesterday.

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel Darren Chester said it was vital that all those involved in the Defence and veteran support system had their say through the Royal Commission.

“Over the coming weeks I will be undertaking a public consultation process to ensure the Royal Commission is focused and based on the experiences and perspectives of those who have been impacted by Defence and veteran suicide,” Mr Chester said.

“Any member of the community or any organisation is able to provide their input regarding the broad themes released on Monday 19 April and I would encourage them to provide their feedback.

“As part of this process it is important that all state and territories are involved and I have written to my counterparts in each jurisdiction to seek their assistance in consulting with the community.

“We must all work together to ensure that this Royal Commission can start promptly and put us on the path to a better understanding of suicide in the serving and ex-serving community, and importantly, how we can continue to improve the supports available to service men and women, and their families.”

Following consultation, all feedback will be provided to the Attorney-General’s Department which will lead the drafting of the Terms of Reference. Interested individuals, groups, peak bodies, ex-service organisations and community members are able to review the broad themes for consultation on the [DVA website](#) and can contribute to the consultation process by emailing royalcommission@dva.gov.au.

Mr Chester said the Government was committed to ensuring ADF members, veterans and their families had access to the support they need, when and where they need it, especially those who are vulnerable or at risk.

“Importantly, I want to assure the Defence and veteran community that the Government will continue to prioritise the health and wellbeing of serving and ex-serving personnel and their families,” Mr Chester said.

“For anyone who may find this process difficult, help is available 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.”

[ENDS]

Tuesday 27 April 2021

'Have your say': Veterans' Minister (Goulburn Valley)

The Federal Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Darren Chester is urging the Goulburn Valley military community to 'have your say' on the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Mr Chester is visiting the electorate of Nicholls for two days as part of consultation with veterans, family members, service personnel and ex-service organisations.

"With a large veteran community and the Puckapunyal Military Area, it's important communities in Nicholls have a chance to have their say on this important issue," Mr Chester said.

"The Member for Nicholls Damian Drum has invited me here to meet with veterans, Defence personnel and their families to discuss the Royal Commission and other significant issues.

"Damian has been active in promoting the interests of veterans and Defence personnel in his community and I look forward to listening to locals on this visit.

"Any member of the community or any organisation across Australia is able to provide input regarding the broad themes for the Terms of Reference announced this week."

Mr Chester said the Royal Commission was a chance to unite the veteran community and build on other measures which have been put in place to support veterans and their families.

"We have a world-class system of support for veterans and their families and Australians can be proud of the fact that \$11.5 billion in taxpayers' money will be provided this year to allow the Department of Veterans' Affairs to do its work," Mr Chester said.

"There's an enormous amount of help available through DVA, ex-service organisations and community groups which is making a difference every day.

"But the system isn't perfect and the Royal Commission is an opportunity to identify any weaknesses, listen to the ideas of Australians, and implement changes that can help to save lives."

Support for veterans and their families is available free of charge through the Open Arms counselling service on 1800 011 046.

ENDS

From the DVA Secretary – 3rd May 2021

As you are aware, consultation to inform the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is underway until Friday 21 May 2021. In response to the feedback received from some members of the veteran community so far, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel, the Hon Darren Chester MP, has announced that, from today, you can provide your written feedback directly to the Attorney-General's Department in addition to the Department of Veterans' Affairs. A copy of Minister Chester's media release is attached.

Those who wish to provide written feedback to inform the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, can now do so either directly to the Department of Veterans' Affairs website or alternatively, through the Attorney General's website.

The direct link to the Attorney-General's website page to provide feedback is: [Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission – Public Consultation | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](#)

The link to the DVA website: www.dva.gov.au/public-consultation-inform-terms-reference-royal-commission-defence-and-veteran-suicide

Regards, Liz



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

MEDIA STATEMENT

Monday, 3 May 2021

INFORMING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ROYAL COMMISSION

Over the past fortnight consultation has started on the themes for the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The Royal Commission is a chance to unite the veteran community and everyone has a chance to have their say as we consult widely on the Terms of Reference.

I have already held discussions with hundreds of veterans, serving members and families and the feedback has been extremely thoughtful and constructive.

They are not interested in arguing amongst themselves, they want the wider military community to unite and make the most of this important opportunity to shape the direction of the Royal Commission.

My role is entirely consistent with other Royal Commissions where the portfolio Minister undertakes consultation, but the actual drafting of the Terms of Reference is undertaken independently of my Department by the Attorney-General.

However, I recognise that some veterans may not be comfortable engaging in this process through DVA. The government has listened to the concerns of these veterans who don't wish to provide their input to DVA as part of this process and I have provided this feedback to the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon Michaela Cash, who has agreed to accommodate those concerns and ensure that all voices can be heard.

Veterans, family members and service personnel can send their submissions for the Terms of Reference directly through the Attorney-General's website: [Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission – Public Consultation | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](https://www.ag.gov.au/Defence-and-Veteran-Suicide-Royal-Commission-Public-Consultation)

All feedback to either DVA or the Attorney-General's Department is required to be submitted by 21 May 2021 and will be carefully considered as the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission are finalised.

ENDS