

Veterans' input wanted for suicide report

An independent study of the incidence of suicide in the ex-service community will be conducted by Associate Professor David Dunt, epidemiologist and public health specialist, and is expected to report to Government by the end of this year.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, said on August 22 that the study would include a number of specific cases of suicide by ex-service members in recent years to help identify members who may be at risk.

"We know that war service can have both a physical and mental impact on the lives of service personnel. Physical impairment can be obvious, psychological injury is less so," he said.

"This Government is determined to support veterans and ex serving personnel who may suffer psychologically as a result of their service, however to do so we need a better understanding of the incidence and characteristics of suicide amongst this community."

Professor Dunt is also conducting the recently announced review of mental health services in the Australian Defence Force.

The suicide study will be conducted independently of DVA and the ADF.

Professor Dunt is welcoming submissions from members of the veteran and ex-service community, with submissions closing on 5 October 2008. Submissions will not be published, allowing veterans full privacy and confidentiality. Submissions can be sent to suicidestudy2008@bigpond.com or PO Box 4145 Melbourne University VIC 3052. Further details are available at www.dva.gov.au.

Footy aids Peacekeepers' memorial fund



The site allocated to the new memorial, on the eastern side of Anzac Parade, is marked with a white spot (a white bar is added to help the reader locate it).

The Richmond and Hawthorn AFL clash at the MCG on August 17, doubled as a fundraiser for the Memorial for Australian Peacekeepers to be erected on ANZAC Parade, Canberra.

A specially designed Peacekeeping Bear created by Victorian company, Bears Over There, was launched on the day. Dressed in UN blue beret and fatigues, sales of the Peacekeeping Bear will go towards raising funds for the Memorial Project.

The Australian Government has donated \$200,000 towards the Memorial

which seeks to show that Australia's contribution to peacekeeping exemplifies Australian values of openness, fairness, egalitarianism, mateship, initiative, and respect for diversity and social justice. The Memorial will commemorate the service of those who have given their lives in the service of others.

For more information about the Peacekeeping Memorial, how to become a supporter and how to order a Peacekeeping Bear visit: www.peacekeepingmemorial.org.au

Women's defence role honoured

The match between the Sydney Swans and the Geelong Cats on August 16 was a tribute to Australian women who served Australia in times of war.

In pre-match a statement the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, said, "Women have made a tremendous contribution to the defence of Australia for more than 100 years, and today are among the leaders in the Australian Defence Force, serving in key operational positions."

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, said, "By the end of the Vietnam War more than 68,000 women had served and tens of thousands more volunteered to help Australia in times of war. There are more than 7,000 women serving in today's Australian Defence Force."

The pre-match commemorative ceremony at ANZ Stadium honoured more than 40 women including veterans from the Second World War, the Red Cross, the Australian Women's Land Army and current serving women, including Major General Elizabeth Cosson, with a cavalcade around the main oval.

The tribute was jointly organised by the Sydney Swans AFL Club, the Australian Football League, the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Previous tribute matches began with the 60th anniversary of the 1942 Kokoda campaign. Other matches have commemorated those who served in the Pacific campaigns of the Second World War, in Vietnam and last year, 60 years of Australian peace operations.

Suicide prompts exhaustive studies and support

The Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs has published the three reports that make up the result of Gregg Review of the circumstances surrounding the service and suicide of Signaller Geoffrey Gregg.

Signaller Gregg joined the Australian Army in 2000 and served in Afghanistan in 2002 as part of 3 Squadron SAS Regiment. He was discharged for medical reasons in May 2004 and died on 23 September, 2006.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, and the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, said the review confirmed the Government's concerns regarding mental-health support services for serving and former defence personnel.

"[Before] the election we were aware of significant problems with servicemen and women and veterans accessing ... ADF and DVA mental-health support services. Labor's Plan for Defence and Veterans detailed a number of initiatives that addressed these issues," Mr Griffin said.

"[Although] we cannot solve today all the issues raised by the review, we have begun the work to improve the care offered within the ADF, in transition, and after service."

Mr Snowdon said improvements

Summary of programs and initiatives

- Review of mental health services in the ADF and transition through discharge;
- Planned independent study of suicide in the ex-service community;
- Applied Suicide and Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) program — training people to recognise and respond to those at risk of suicide.
- VVCS — Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service;
- 24-hour crisis telephone support;
- Operation Life — suicide prevention initiative. The 2008-09 Budget provided additional \$3 million over three years;
- At Ease — mental-health awareness program;
- Simpler discharging from ADF;
- DVA Client Liaison Unit incorporating a tailored service for clients with multiple needs;
- Stepping Out — civilian integration program;
- ADF's Integrated People Support Strategy to prepare service people for life after defence before they leave; It is under way in WA and SA and soon to begin in north Queensland and central Sydney;
- Interdepartmental Working Group;
- Increased funding of \$14.9 million for ex-service organisations to support and train advocates;
- Transition case-management pilot and family support trial (Townsville).

were under way in the handling of mental-health issues and the quality of mental-health support for serving and former members of the defence forces.

"In addition, a review of mental-health services in the ADF was announced in May and will examine the spectrum of mental-health policies across Defence and transitioning into the care of DVA."

A report to government was expected

before the end of this year. The findings in the reports by Ron McLeod AM, Christopher Doogan AM and the Inspector-General of the ADF, Geoff Earley AM, had also found a number of problems with transition out of the services.

The report by Ron McLeod AM went into Signaller Gregg's relationship with Commonwealth agencies. The report by Christopher Doogan AM dealt

with Signaller Gregg's contact with DVA and Comsuper and the Inspector General of the ADF, Geoff Earley AM, investigated Signaller Gregg's experience in the ADF.

Mr Griffin said, "The Gregg Review showed that the legislation is complex and there is heavy reliance on [voluntary] pension officers and advocates to provide advice to veterans."

"Amongst a wide range of new transition and support initiatives, the Interdepartmental Working Group, chaired by the Secretary of DVA, has been established to help solve the problems encountered by discharging members when dealing with multiple agencies."

Work had begun to simplify claim forms, streamline applications, minimise proof-of-identity requirements for new claimants and enable the sharing of medical records, including assessments, between departments.

Any suicide was a tragedy. However, this review provided specific strategies to better support discharging members and those suffering from the effects of their service.

The reports and responses can be downloaded from www.dva.gov.au and www.defence.gov.au/publications.cfm

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