

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Northern Territory Government Response

Acknowledgement of Country

The Northern Territory Government respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout the Northern Territory, and recognises their continuing connections to their lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures, and to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Acknowledgement of the unique nature of military service

We acknowledge the significant contributions and strength of people with lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors who shared their stories, their knowledge and their experiences of systemic, structural and cultural issues and risk factors contributing to defence and veteran death by suicide.

Their contributions have helped inform the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and will guide our work as we continue to support the veteran community in the Northern Territory.

Content Warning

This document discusses suicide, suicidality, military sexual trauma and other content which readers may find distressing.

Crisis Support Services		
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467	24-hour counselling service for suicide prevention and mental health. Available via telephone, online or video chat.
1800RESPECT	1880 737 732	24-hour counselling services for sexual assault, family and domestic violence.
Open Arms	1800 011 046	24-hour mental health support for Navy, Army & Air Force personnel, veterans and their families.
Defence Member and Family Support	1800 624 608	24-hour service providing a range of practical and emotional support programs for families facing emergency or crisis.
Defence All-hours Support Line	1800 628 036	24-hour service for Australian Defence Force members and their families providing help to access military or civilian mental health services.
Lifeline Australia	13 11 14 or text 0477 13 11 14	24-hour crisis support service. Available via telephone, online or text chat.
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636	24-hour counselling service. Available via telephone, online or email.
Men's Referral Service	1300 766 491	24-hour counselling, information and referral service for men concerned about their own use of violence or abusive behaviour.
MensLine	1300 78 99 78	24-hour support for men with concerns about mental health, anger management, family violence, addiction, relationship stress and wellbeing. Available via telephone, online and video chat.
13YARN	13 92 76	24-hour national support line for First Nations people in crisis.
QLife	1800 184 527 or visit qlife.org.au	Phone and webchat service is available 3pm to midnight every day, providing space for where LGBTQI+ people and their loved ones can talk about anything affecting their lives.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (the Royal Commission) was established on 8 July 2021. Over the next 3 years, the Commissioners heard from current and ex-serving members of the Australia Defence Force (ADF), their families and friends, the Department of Defence (Defence) the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), ex-service organisations and other stakeholders about systemic, structural and cultural issues and other risk factors contributing to defence and veteran death by suicide.

The Royal Commission handed down its Final Report on 9 September 2024, containing 122 recommendations covering a wide range of issues addressing identified systemic risk factors and overarching drivers of suicide and suicidality in current and ex-serving ADF members.

The recommendations are largely directed to Defence and DVA. 10 of 122 recommendations have implications for the Northern Territory.

1.2. The Northern Territory veteran community

The Northern Territory veteran community comprises of current and ex-serving members of the ADF, partners/spouses, children, siblings, parents, widows, and doesn't exclude anyone with an evident link to, or interest in matters associated with veterans' welfare or wellbeing.

The Northern Territory has the second highest per capita population of veterans, a large ADF presence, a veteran community of 20,000 plus and is a location of strategic importance for Defence.

The 2021 census shows the Northern Territory had 3,868 fulltime ADF members, 545 ADF reservists and 5,036 ex-serving members of the ADF. There are 6,397 DVA card holders in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory has a rich and important Defence history, especially during and after the Second World War. The Northern Territory became a frontline of Australia's defence when Darwin was bombed by Imperial Japanese Forces on 19 February 1942– the first and most devastating attack on Australian soil. Over 240 people were killed and the city suffered widespread damage, prompting a significant military build-up in the North. The Northern Territory became a critical base for Allied troops, with airfields, hospitals and supply routes established across the region.

The 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit was formed in 1942 and was tasked with patrolling remote areas of northern Australia as the Japanese continued to steadily advance in the Pacific. The unit, nicknamed the Nackaroos, included Aboriginal personnel whose deep knowledge of Country was vital to their roles as guides.

NORFORCE (North-West Mobile Force) was formed in 1981, and the Regiment's lineage can be traced back to the 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit. The unique Army Reserve unit draws heavily on local Aboriginal knowledge and personnel to patrol and protect vast, remote areas of northern Australia, continuing the Territory's enduring legacy in national defence.

Darwin is a tri-service location, with the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and having a presence in the city. Katherine is the home of RAAF Base Tindal and ADF personnel can be found across the Northern Territory from Nhulunbuy to Alice Springs.

2. Northern Territory Response to Recommendations

2.1. Introduction and Approach

In the Northern Territory, Veterans Engagement and Support within the Department of People, Sport and Culture is responsible for working with other government agencies, non-government organisations and the community to develop, implement, monitor and report on policies and programs which support the veteran community.

After the release of the *Northern Territory Defence Veterans' Strategy 2023*, Operation Thrive was developed. Operation Thrive anticipated the findings of the Royal Commission and has ensured the Northern Territory is well placed to respond to the recommendations.

Operation Thrive's vision is to ensure the Northern Territory is an attractive and supportive place for the veteran community to live and work. Operation Thrive has three pillars; Health and Wellbeing, Respect and Recognition; and Transition, Education and Employment.

The Northern Territory's response to the Royal Commission is a whole-of-government response to the 10 recommendations which directly impact the Northern Territory. These relate to Childhood Education; Recording of Criminal Convictions; Healthcare; Employment; Homeless and Incarcerated Veterans; Coronial Practices; and Data.

2.2. Next Steps

Under Operation Thrive, the Northern Territory Government is ensuring the veteran community feels supported and seen and has already begun to fund and deliver initiatives which foster social connectedness, recognise the value and demands of service life, and support the overall health and wellbeing of the veteran community.

Where possible, the Northern Territory Government will consult with the Australian, state and territory governments, the veteran community, ex-service organisations, service providers and a range of stakeholders on the implementation of the recommendations and further supports and services provided through Operation Thrive.

It is acknowledged that some of the recommendations require the availability of additional resources and funding. The Northern Territory will consider these through usual government processes including potential intergovernmental arrangements with the Australian Government.

2.3. Response table

Recommendation	Response	NT Government Actions
Recommendation 4: Mitigate the adverse impacts of the posting cycle Defence should take steps to mitigate the adverse impacts of the posting cycle on members and their families, including: a) measures to reduce the frequency of relocation b) improved supports for members and their families moving to a new location that target known stressors, such as housing, childcare and children's education, partner/spouse employment and community ties c) measures to implement greater mobility across the Australian Defence Force and flexible working options d) working with state and territory governments to ensure that children of Defence personnel can enrol in educational institutions without having a fixed address as a result of Defence-required relocations of the family. (Chapter 4: Postings and deployments)	Agree	Families enrolling their children at a Northern Territory Government school are asked whether the student is in the Northern Territory due to an ADF posting. This identifier supports ease of enrolment should families be awaiting posting information. Twenty-four schools in the Northern Territory employ a Defence School Mentor in partnership with the Department of Defence. These staff support defence families as they enrol and settle into the school community, including accessing relevant wraparound and outside school hours care services. Two early childhood education and care services provide priority access to the children of Defence personnel, including one service which is located on a Northern Territory defence base Through Operation Thrive, the Veteran Community Grants provide funding to organisations throughout the Northern Territory to deliver events and activities which assist in improving the physical or emotional wellbeing of the veterans' community, foster opportunities for community building and social connection of the veterans' community, are accessible to a broad number of members in the veterans' community, that promote the services and supports available in the Northern Territory and which assist to recognise and/or celebrate the veterans' community. Five higher-education scholarships for veterans and partners and dependents of current and ex-serving ADF members are available to study through Charles Darwin University (CDU). The scholarships provide a one-off payment of \$1,200 for a computer or tablet and \$2,500 per semester for three years. The Returned and Services League of Australia (Queensland Branch) (RSL) employment program, and the Human Quotient Group Cowork Coplay program will deliver programs which support partners of current and ex-serving members of the ADF in Darwin

		and Katherine in finding meaningful employment and social connection.
Recommendation 23: Record convictions of sexual offences in Australian Defence Force records and civilian criminal records As a matter of urgency, the Australian Government should: (a) ensure the Australian Defence Force has a complete and reliable record of all serving members who have been convicted of sexual offences and related offences (including stalking and intimate image abuse) in civilian courts (b) work with state and territory governments to ensure that civilian criminal records include convictions of sexual offences and related offences (including stalking and intimate image abuse) made under the Defence Force Discipline Act 1982 (Cth). (Chapter 8: Military sexual violence)	No action required	The Northern Territory reports all convictions of sexual offences to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.
Recommendation 72: Expand and strengthen healthcare services for veterans The Australian Government and state and territory governments should prioritise networks of care in the National Funding Agreement on Veterans' Wellbeing (Recommendation 88). To enable this, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) should develop a plan to expand and strengthen specialised health care for veterans. It should set out how to bring together the different components of the health system to meet the health needs of veterans. DVA should complete the plan by September 2026 and submit it to the Veterans' Ministerial Council for endorsement as part of the funding agreement. The plan must set out measures to improve the coverage of specialised veterans' care, including by: a) providing support for primary and allied care providers whose services focus on veterans' health needs	Agree-in-principle	In 2023, the Northern Territory Government supported the delivery of veteran-centric healthcare training to 23 General Practitioners in the Darwin area. In 2025, Operation Thrive is delivering 2 veteran-centric healthcare training events to General Practitioners, practice nurses and practice managers. Northern Territory Health has held long-term engagement with DVA through provision of hospital services and placement programs for ADF clinicians.

b) expanding veteran-specific secondary and tertiary health services c) developing additional partnership agreements between DVA and primary health networks. It must also support the integration of veterans' health services at a local and national level, including by: d) better informing veterans about available services e) using existing health infrastructure, such as primary health networks f) developing local exchanges to tighten relationships between medical and allied health care practitioners. The plan should be guided by current and future needs and informed by data on Australia's veteran population showing the size of veteran communities in different areas, where specialised services currently exist or are lacking, and how and where veterans access health services. (Chapter 18: Health care for ex-serving members)		
Recommendation 77: Develop a suite of postvention resources in collaboration with stakeholders Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs should fund and facilitate the development of a postvention network of suicide-bereavement resources in collaboration with ex-service organisations, states and territories, lived experience peers, and civilian support organisations to augment current postvention offerings, which can be inclusively accessed by and are tailored for the military community and all those affected by veteran suicide. (Chapter 20: Postvention)	Agree	The Northern Territory Government is committed to working with the Australian Government on this commitment.
Recommendation 85: Develop employment pathways for ex-serving members in public sector agencies	Agree	The Office for the Commissioner of Public Employment (OCPE) has signed a 12-month agreement with Soldier On, a national not-for-

The Australian Public Service Commission and its state and territory equivalents should work with public sector agencies to develop and prioritise employment pathways for ex-serving members. They should prioritise agencies in portfolios where military capabilities and lived experience of service are especially relevant, including health, justice, corrections, police, veterans' affairs and defence. (Chapter 23: Transition from military to civilian life)		profit organisation, which provides holistic support services to current and ex-serving members of the ADF and their families. The Northern Territory Government has pledged \$5,000, the Platinum Pledge amount, to support Soldier On's veteran employment initiatives. The Northern Territory Public Service (NTPS) is working to prioritise employment pathways into the NTPS for veterans, reservists and defence families and to ensure that the NTPS is recognised as a defence-friendly employer.
Recommendation 88: Develop a national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing A national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing should be developed, with immediate focus on the following priorities: a) improving outcomes for veterans who are experiencing homelessness, including a long-term investment framework that supports capital and operational expenditure for veteran-specific housing and the provision of wraparound services b) supporting veterans who are incarcerated, both during and after their incarceration c) facilitating school enrolments for children of serving members, without requiring a confirmed address d) developing networks of health care for veterans e) obtaining individual consent from veterans who separate involuntarily for medical or other reasons (and other cohorts at higher risk of suicide and suicidality) to provide their personal data to state and territory governments to ensure they can receive tailored support and referrals to veteran-specific services, including Veterans' and Families' Hubs. (Chapter 24: Empowering veterans to thrive)	Agree	The Northern Territory is supporting families enrolling their children at a Northern Territory Government school through asking whether the student is in the Northern Territory due to an ADF posting, thus supporting the ease of enrolment should families be awaiting housing location information.
Recommendation 103: Improve the support, communication and services provided to Defence families		The Northern Territory remains committed to improving the lives of Defence families through Operation Thrive and will continue to

In recognition of the critical role that Defence families play in Defence capability, and the stressors that service life places on the member and their family unit, Defence should: a) increase and enhance the suite of family support programs and initiatives available to Defence families, informed by co-design with members, families and Advocates. This should include: i. <i>systematically analysing data from the Defence Member and Family Helpline to better understand issues and trends, and create opportunities to better assist members and their families</i> ii. <i>removing barriers to families directly accessing information and services provided by Defence Member and Family Support (DMFS)</i> iii. <i>providing an evidence-based suite of information and resources to support families, especially at times of peak stress including postings, return from deployment and member transition</i> iv. <i>facilitating greater access to or provision of family therapy, and services that support partners and children of Defence members</i> v. <i>an enhanced DMFS communications strategy</i> b) ensure that systems are in place to communicate directly with families on an 'opt out' basis to provide information on available services and supports, assisted by a refreshed DMFS communications strategy and greater efforts to publicise the supports available c) develop and implement a framework to evaluate outcomes, including the efficiency and effectiveness of all current and future DMFS initiatives, with this material to be made public to demonstrate transparency and accountability for the performance of DMFS d) work with the Australian, state and territory governments to investigate and improve arrangements for facilitating	Agree	improve the support, communication and services available to Defence and veteran families. Operation Thrive has recognised the impacts of the posting cycle upon ADF partners and their employment, and implemented, thus far, 2 programs to assist partners in finding successful and meaningful employment. The RSL Employment program and Cowork Coplay programs will be delivered in Darwin and Katherine. The scholarships available through the Operation Thrive partnership with CDU promote the upskilling of partners to support further employment opportunities. The Department of People, Sport and Culture and OCPE are working together to form a pathway for employment into the NTPS for veterans, partners and family members. In 2024, Sitzler, Solider On and the Northern Territory Government signed a 2-year Partnership to provide financial support for the continuation of Soldier On services in Darwin. Solider On delivers holistic support services that enables current and ex-serving members of the ADF, and their families, to lead meaningful civilian lives. In May 2024, Ventia and the Northern Territory Government signed a 2-year Memorandum of Understanding for Ventia to provide for 20 positions annually for veterans and partners of current and ex-serving ADF members. Ventia also leads the Veterans Business Alliance which harnesses the value of employing veterans and partners and provides networking opportunities for businesses and organisations.
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employment opportunities for partners of Defence members as well as opportunities for remote working, or preferential employment of this cohort in appropriate roles e) work with the Australian Government, following the completion of the Defence Childcare Review and the Productivity Commission Review into Early Childhood Education and Care, to identify and realise opportunities to improve the provision of child care services to Defence members. (Chapter 27: Importance of families)		
Recommendation 105: Improve coordination with coroners and the National Coronial Information System The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department should work with its state and territory counterparts to establish mechanisms that improve coordination between coroners, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the National Coronial Information System and work towards: a) aligning coronial practices related to making determinations of intentional self-harm to improve the consistency and timeliness of national suicide reporting b) implementing communication strategies between Defence, the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, DVA and coroners to support the streamlined provision of information and reduce the risk of stress on families c) sharing good-practice support regarding trauma-informed care. (Chapter 28: Coroners)	Agree-in-principle	The Northern Territory Government is committed to working with the Australian Government on this commitment.
Recommendation 107: Establish the National Veterans' Data Asset	Note: a) and b)	The Northern Territory acknowledges that progressing this recommendation is dependent on the Australian Government establishing a National Veterans' Data Asset and anticipates using the asset when available.

To improve understanding of deaths by suicide and provide better support to veterans and their families, the Australian Government should: a) provide appropriation funding to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the National Suicide Prevention Office (or any subsequent body assuming its functions) to establish and maintain a National Veterans' Data Asset that brings together data from Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and states and territories, to enable timely monitoring and surveillance of suicide and suicidality of serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members b) provide appropriation funding to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the National Suicide Prevention Office to: i. use the National Veterans' Data Asset to produce discrete annual public reports and other research to monitor and improve understanding of suicidality and deaths by suicide, and the associated risk factors for serving and ex-serving ADF members and their families ii. commission an independent program of evaluation of the implementation and functioning of the National Veterans' Data Asset, including an interim evaluation and a post-implementation evaluation. The Australian Government and state and territory governments, through their relevant agencies, should use the National Veterans' Data Asset for the purposes of: c) furthering their understanding of suicide, suicidality, and health and wellbeing among serving and ex-serving members and their families; and d) preventing deaths by suicide and improving postvention for serving and ex-serving members and their families.	Agree-in-principle: c) and d)	
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(Chapter 29: Use of data and research by Defence and DVA) Recommendation 108: Ensure that all relevant jurisdictions and entities regularly provide data to the National Veterans' Data Asset So that all jurisdictions provide data regularly to the National Veterans' Data Asset: a) the Australian Government, and state and territory governments, through their relevant agencies, should provide relevant data at quarterly intervals to the National Veterans' Data Asset (Recommendation 107) b) Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs should prioritise data governance arrangements in order to provide data for the National Veterans' Data Asset to support its development and ongoing use. (Chapter 29: Use of data and research by Defence and DVA)	Subject to further consideration	The Northern Territory Government will participate in discussions regarding this recommendation with the Australian Government and other jurisdictions, noting that there is no federal funding identified to progress this recommendation at this stage.
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