Veterans, war and mental health services

Summary

- Visit the Australian Defence Force’s At Ease website for useful information on mental illness and mental health support services.
- Call the Australian Defence Force (ADF) All Hours Support Line on 1800 628 036 for 24-hour counselling and mental health support. This service is available to all ADF members and their families.
- Call the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service on 1800 011 046 for confidential and free crisis counselling for war veterans and their families.
- Call the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 for 24-hour support, information and help in connecting with your local community.

It is normal to experience times of sadness, anxiety and anger following military service. However, if these feelings become overwhelming or linger for more than a week or two, it may be time to ask for help.

The Australian Government scheme ‘At Ease’ offers support, counselling and other resources to help war veterans and Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel living with depression, anxiety and other kinds of mental illness.

Recognising the signs of mental health issues in veterans and ADF personnel

Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and other disorders are common among the war veteran community. These mental health issues affect everyone in different ways – from sleeplessness and recurring memories to family violence and excessive drinking.

What you are feeling may be related to a mental health issue that you are not aware of.

Common symptoms of mental illness include:

- poor sleep
- problems with your sex life
- problems in your personal relationships
- loneliness
- feeling down
- anxiousness
- recurring memories
- grief
- feelings of anger
- excessive drug taking
- excessive drinking
- violence
- gambling.

If you think you have, or someone close to you has a mental health issue, it is important to get help before things get worse.

Visit the At Ease website for information on the early warning signs of mental illness, and the various mental health treatment plans and support services available across Victoria.

Common mental health issues in veterans and ADF personnel

Everyone deals with traumatic or stressful events in different ways. Some people may withdraw from family and
friends or become aggressive, while others may have issues with alcohol or drugs. There are, however, a number of mental health issues that commonly affect veterans and ADF personnel.

These include:

- depression
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- social anxiety disorder
- generalised anxiety disorder
- panic attacks
- agoraphobia
- alcohol use disorders
- drug use disorders.

**Families of veterans and ADF personnel, and mental illness**

Reconnecting with everyday life after experiencing a traumatic event (war, conflict or natural disasters) can be a difficult adjustment. Sometimes it may feel as though a different person has come home. Your partner or child may seem withdrawn or distant. They might have trouble talking about what happened during their service, or they might have problems with anger, alcohol or drugs that they did not have before. If you need help but do not know where to begin, visit the Families section of the At Ease website for information on how to start the healing process.

**Get help now**

If you are in crisis, in danger, or you have seriously harmed yourself, call triple zero (000) for emergency services.

If you do not need immediate assistance but you need help it is a good idea to talk to your friends and family about how you are feeling. They can give you the support you need while you work through the issues you are dealing with. If you are not comfortable talking to those people that are close to you, visit your local doctor or healthcare professional. They will be able to provide referrals and direct you to more support if you need it.

The Australian Defence Force has a number of telephone support services available to all personnel and veterans and their families. These services allow you to speak to counsellors experienced in issues relating to military service.

Services include:

- **Australian Defence Force (ADF) All Hours Support Line** – call 1800 628 036 for 24-hour counselling and support. This service is available to all ADF members and their families.

- **Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS)** – call 1800 011 046 for 24-hour Australia-wide counselling and support. This service is available to all veterans and their families.

The **Defence Family Helpline** – call 1800 624 608 for 24-hour support, information and help in connecting with your local community.

**Lifeline** – call 13 11 14 for free, 24-hour Australia-wide crisis support and suicide prevention services.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your counsellor
- Australian Defence Force (ADF) All Hours Support Line, call 1800 628 036
- Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, call 1800 011 046.