



A snapshot of Australian Veterans' Mental Health Research: Important insights for clinical practice

This document highlights some additional resources related to this topic.

Studies

Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme

The Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme (TWRP) is the most comprehensive study undertaken in Australia that examines the impact of military service on the mental, physical and social health of serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members including those who have been deployed in contemporary conflicts, and their families.

This research builds on the findings of the world-leading research conducted with current serving members of the ADF in the 2010 Military Health Outcomes Program. TWRP comprises three studies: the Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Study (five reports and two papers), Impact of Combat Study and the Family Wellbeing Study, each comprising one publication.

The first released reports and studies are:

[Mental Health Prevalence Report](#) explores the prevalence of mental disorders among ADF members who have transitioned from Regular ADF service between 2010 and 2014; and examines self-reported mental health status of Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF.

[Pathways to Care Report](#) assesses pathways to care for Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF, including those with a probable 30-day mental disorder.

[Physical Health Status Report](#) examines the physical health status of Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF.

[Family Wellbeing Study](#) investigates the impact of ADF service on the health and wellbeing of the families of Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF.

The below are to be released:

Technology Use and Wellbeing investigates technology and its utility for health and mental health programmes including implications for future health service delivery.

Mental Health Changes Over Time: A Longitudinal Perspective conducts predictive modelling of the trajectory of mental health symptoms/disorders of Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF, removing the need to rely on estimated rates.

The Health and Wellbeing of ADF Reservists paper investigates the mental health and wellbeing of currently serving 2015 Ab-initio Reservists.

Psychosocial Predictors of Health paper examines the factors that contribute to the wellbeing of Transitioned ADF and the 2015 Regular ADF.

Impact of Combat Study follows up on the mental, physical and neurocognitive health and wellbeing of participants who deployed to the Middle East Area of Operations between 2010 and 2012.

Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme Key Findings Report summarises the key findings of the Programme.

Further information is available at: dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/

Incidence of suicide in serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel: detailed analysis 2001–2015

The Government has released a detailed analysis on the incidence of suicide among serving and ex-serving ADF personnel from 2001–2015. The report can be found on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website. The Government will continue to maintain a record of ex-serving ADF member suicide deaths and will annually update incidence rates of suicide among serving and ex-serving ADF members as new cause of death data becomes available.

aihw.gov.au/reports

Coordinated Veterans' Care (CVC) Mental Health Pilot

The CVC Mental Health Pilot aims to improve the mental health support available to veterans in rural and regional areas. The CVC Mental Health Pilot will target those veterans diagnosed with mild-to-moderate anxiety or depression and who have a combined co-morbid physical health condition requiring pain management.

dva.gov.au/providers/provider-programs

Veteran Suicide Prevention Trial

The pilot will provide support to veterans and former ADF members who have experienced a suicidal crisis and required hospitalisation. A previous suicide attempt is a known risk factor for further suicide attempts. The time immediately after discharge from hospital can be a particularly vulnerable period. This pilot will connect individuals with support following hospitalisation and continue this support for up to three months following discharge from hospital.

dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health

Current military specific research trials – Open Arms collaborations

Open Arms formerly Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS), is currently collaborating with Phoenix Australia - Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Phoenix Australia) and a range of other organisations on military specific research trials:

Stepping Out – Attention Reset (SOAR)

Open Arms will soon commence a trial of an innovative attention control training program – using computer-based attention control training. Open Arms is working with Phoenix Australia and Tel Aviv University to conduct a randomised control trial to evaluate the efficacy of attention control training to prevent and reduce existing anxiety, and traumatic stress symptoms in this high-risk cohort.

openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/stepping-out-attention-reset-trial-soar

Rapid Exposure Support for Trauma Recovery (RESTORE)

In partnership with Phoenix Australia, Department of Defence (DoD) and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), Open Arms is seeking to confirm that intensive exposure therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is as effective as prolonged exposure therapy.

openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/rapid-exposure-supporting-trauma-recovery-restore-trial

Moral Injury Outcome Scale – Phase One

In partnership with the DoD and Phoenix Australia, Open Arms is sponsoring a study to develop a new moral injury outcomes scale to potentially be used by Open Arms and the ADF as part of routine mental health assessment and treatment, and to assess the outcomes of care delivered to address moral injury.

openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/development-moral-injury-scale

Synergy Technology Trial (Sydney region)

In partnership with the Department of Health and Innowell Pty Ltd, Open Arms is leading a trial to assess whether an internet-based platform – 'Synergy Online System' – will assist clients to manage their mental health through self-referral to Open Arms by bringing together integrated and interoperable telephone applications, e-mental health tools and other resources.

openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/synergy-technology-trial-sydney-region

Community Coordination Pilot (North Queensland region)

Open Arms is trialling a program which involves coordination of mental health care for clients who need additional support.

openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/community-coordination-pilot-north-queensland-region

Townsville Suicide Prevention Pilot (Operation COMPASS)

Open Arms is supporting a project run by the [North Queensland Primary Health Network](https://www.northqueenslandprimaryhealth.com.au/), which aims to reduce the incidence of suicide among ex-ADF members and their families.

[primaryhealth.com.au/ex-ADF-suicide-prevention-townsville/](https://www.primaryhealth.com.au/ex-ADF-suicide-prevention-townsville/)

Operation Life Suicide Prevention Pilot Workshop

In collaboration with DVA, Uniting Care Community and Australian Health Care Associates, Open Arms is assisting the research and design of a suicide prevention program for the ex-service community.

[openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/operation-life-suicide-prevention-pilot-workshop](https://www.openarms.gov.au/professionals/research-and-collaboration/operation-life-suicide-prevention-pilot-workshop)

Group programs

Operation Life - Group Programs

Open Arms delivers Operation Life Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). The workshops raise awareness on suicide prevention and prepare individuals to work with people at risk to increase their immediate safety and to get further help. ASIST workshops are free for anyone who is concerned about family, friends or colleagues in the veteran community. This program is offered in addition to the Operation Life website and associated mobile App (outlined in Other related online resources).

For information on Open Arms Group Program dates and locations, please visit: [openarms.gov.au/get-support](https://www.openarms.gov.au/get-support)

Treatment services for veterans

Non-Liability Health Care

DVA can pay for treatment for mental health conditions without the need for the conditions to be accepted as related to service. This is known as non-liability health care (NLHC) and anyone who has served at least one day in the full-time ADF or reservists with certain service experience can access free treatment for any mental health condition.

Veterans only need to call DVA on free call 1800 555 254 or email nlhc@dva.gov.au to apply.

[dva.gov.au/factsheet](https://www.dva.gov.au/factsheet)

Open Arms

Open Arms provides free, confidential, nation-wide counselling and support to current and former ADF personnel and their families. Open Arms has an integrated, 24/7 service delivery system, that includes counselling (individual, couple and family), group programs, case management, and after-hours telephone support. If you have a client you consider may benefit from support from Open Arms, please call 1800 011 046 to discuss.

[openarms.gov.au/get-support](https://www.openarms.gov.au/get-support)

ADF Post-discharge GP Health Assessment

All former serving members of the ADF can access a one-off comprehensive health assessment from their GP. This assessment is available to all former serving members of either the permanent or reserve forces and a Medicare rebate is available. A key objective of the assessment is to help GPs identify and diagnose the early onset of physical and/or mental health problems among former serving ADF members.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals

DVA Rehabilitation

Complementary to primary and allied health treatment, DVA provides whole-of-person rehabilitation to help clients adapt to and recover from injuries or illnesses relating to their ADF service.

Rehabilitation can assist individuals coordinate their medical treatment, assist individuals maximise their independent functioning and quality of life, and return to work when they are ready.

Veterans may be eligible for rehabilitation assistance through DVA if they are incapacitated for service or work, or have an impairment, as a result of a service injury or disease.

Under a psychosocial rehabilitation plan, veterans can access brief intervention counselling to assist them to manage their pain more effectively. [Section 6.5.1 of the CLIK Rehabilitation library](#) describes more about the assistance available.

Further information about DVA rehabilitation is available on the DVA website via

dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing

Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders – Community-Based Treatment Services

DVA funds community-based alcohol and other substance use disorder treatment at over 20 locations across the country. A list of community-based treatment providers can be accessed via:

at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals

These treatment services are available under the NLHC arrangements to anyone who has served at least one day in the full-time ADF or reservists with certain service experience.

Further information on this program can be found at dva.gov.au/factsheet

Additional family support for veterans and their families

Additional family support is available to veterans who have returned from recent conflicts overseas and their families, including certain widowed partners of veterans. To receive this additional support, eligibility requirements must be met. Further information can be found at: [Factsheet – Family Support Package for Veterans and their Families](#) or [Family Support for Widow\(er\)s](#).

Trauma Recovery Programs: Treatment for veterans and former serving members

DVA funds Trauma Recovery Programs – PTSD in hospitals across Australia. These programs are required to meet DVA's National Accreditation Standards for Trauma Recovery Programs – PTSD (2015). These standards provide a framework for ensuring that hospitals provide high quality evidenced based treatment for veterans and former serving members of the ADF who have PTSD.

Further information is available via at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals

Other group programs offered by Open Arms include:

Understanding PTSD for carers and Families

The Understanding PTSD for carers and Families workshop is an educational program which aims to provide partners, carers and families with a knowledge and understanding of PTSD. It focuses on the impact of PTSD on individuals and relationships, promotion of health and wellbeing in carers and outlines resources and services available.

Stepping Out

The *Stepping Out group program* is a 2-day program developed for ADF members and their partners who are about to, or have recently separated from the military. The program helps participants to examine their transition process and what it means to go from military life to civilian life as an individual and as a family – both in practical and emotional terms.

Residential Lifestyle Management Program

The *Residential Lifestyle Management Program* is designed for veterans and their partners who want to improve their wellbeing and enhance their relationship. It provides an opportunity to take time out from the daily routine and focus on a range of lifestyle subjects, such as stress management, communication skills and relationship building.

For further information visit: [Open Arms/Group Programs](https://at-ease.dva.gov.au/open-arms/group-programs)

Other related online resources

At Ease Professional website

DVA's platform for mental health professionals, At Ease is a one-stop shop for information, professional development opportunities, referral options, clinical resources, educational resources and the latest in international research.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals

At Ease portal

At Ease can help veterans, ADF personnel and family members identify the symptoms of poor mental health, find self-help tools and advice, access professional support and learn about treatment options. Families can find advice on how to keep their family healthy while caring for someone with a mental health condition.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/

Operation Life – Website

The Operation Life website targets people experiencing suicidal thoughts or people wanting to learn how to mitigate suicide. The website is complemented by a mobile app that provides safety planning capability and cognitive behavioural therapy to reshape their thoughts. It also supports quick access to services and their clinical support team – see below.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/suicideprevention

The Clinician's Guide is available for Android or iOS users. More information about the app is available at: at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans

Case Formulation eLearning

Case Formulation assists front line therapists to make better sense of complex presentations and to design and plan treatment in collaboration with their patient. This eLearning program assists clinicians to identify and focus on the presenting problems that are likely to have the most impact on recovery and help set priorities for treatment.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/professional-development

Working with Veterans with Mental Health Problems

This one-hour eLearning program assists GPs to better understand common veteran mental health conditions, how military service can affect the mental health of serving and ex-serving personnel and referral pathways for DVA clients.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/professional-development

High Res (High Resilience) mobile app

The High Res suite includes a website and app to help serving and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families manage stress and build resilience.

highres.dva.gov.au

The Right Mix website

The Right Mix website helps serving and ex-serving ADF members better manage their alcohol consumption with information, strategies and online tools.

therightmix.gov.au

ON TRACK with the Right Mix app

The ON TRACK app helps serving and ex-serving ADF members keep track of their alcohol consumption in real time and find out what it is costing them financially and physically.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/on-track-app

PTSD Coach Australia mobile app

The PTSD Coach Australia app can help you learn about and manage symptoms that commonly occur following exposure to trauma. It is free to download from the App Store and Google Play.

at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans/ptsd-coach

Evidence Compass

The Evidence Compass is a repository for literature reviews on issues of importance to the veteran community. The Evidence Compass is designed to be used by researchers, policy-makers, and the broader community. The literature reviews available on this website use the Rapid Evidence Assessment methodology.

dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing

Australian Society for Psychological Medicine

The Australian Society for Psychological Medicine, offers training in psychological medicine skills for GPs.

aspm.org.au

DVA Provider News

Subscribe to [DVA Provider News](#) to receive the latest updates and information for working with DVA patients and clients.

Centenary of Anzac Centre

The Centenary of Anzac Centre comprises a Treatment Research Collaboration and a Practitioner Support Service, to ensure better treatments and improved lives for Australia's veterans and military personnel and their families. The Practitioner Support Service includes a free, confidential consultation service for practitioners which can be accessed nationwide via email, telephone or online. Practitioners and organisations can seek expert advice on a range of issues relating to veteran mental health.

anzaccentre.org.au

The Centenary of Anzac Centre is a [Phoenix Australia](#) initiative.

US National Center for PTSD (US NCPTSD)

The US NCPTSD (www.ptsd.va.gov) has a wide range of valuable clinical and research materials available for free. For research in particular, see "Our Publications" then "Electronic Publications" (https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/electronic_pubs.asp) where practitioners can subscribe for regular email alerts.

The goal at the National Center for PTSD is to keep all professionals up-to-date with the latest in trauma research and how it can be applied.

- [Clinician's Trauma Update Online \(CTU-Online\)](#)
Provides summaries of clinically relevant publications in the trauma field. The summaries are sent via email every two months and are presented in brief format with links to the full article, when available.
- [PTSD Research Quarterly \(RQ\)](#)
Each RQ contains a review article written by guest experts on a specific topic related to PTSD. The current RQ is posted online.
- [PTSD Monthly Update](#)
The PTSD Monthly Update contains informative articles on PTSD, trauma and related topics. This publication is for all audiences.

Subscribe

The National Center for PTSD can keep you informed with the latest information and new products on trauma and PTSD. [Subscribe](#) to our electronic publications.

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)

ISTSS (www.istss.org) is the peak international organisation for clinicians and researchers interested in traumatic stress. Members receive regular email summaries of the latest relevant peer reviewed journal articles.

Journal alerts

Most peer reviewed journals provide a free email contents page service to alert clinicians and researchers to their latest edition. A particularly useful journal for this topic is Journal of Traumatic Stress. It is published by ISTSS and is free to members, but anyone can [subscribe](#) to the contents email alert (which also allows abstracts to be viewed for free).

Veteran specific research

Australian Gulf War Veterans' Health Study (2003)

Authors: Sim, M., Abramson, M., Forbes, A., Glass, D., Ikin, J., Ittak, P., Kelsall, H., Leder, K., McKenzie, D., McNeil, J., Creamer, M., Fritschi, L.

The Australian Gulf War Veterans' Health Study investigated whether Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel who served in the Gulf War (1990 – 91) experienced higher rates of adverse physical and psychological health effects than ADF personnel who had not served in the Gulf War. The study was commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and was conducted by a collaborative medical research team from the Department of Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine at Monash University, Health Services Australia Ltd, the University of Western Australia and The Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne. The study was the first comprehensive health study of a group of Australian war veterans involved in a single theatre of war.

Of the 1,873 Australian Gulf War veterans, 1,456 took part in the study, comprising 80.5% of the target population. The major finding of the study was that Gulf War veterans experienced higher rates of psychological disorders than the control group, in the time since the Gulf War. Gulf War veterans were found to be at significantly increased risk for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) though other anxiety disorders, depression and substance use disorders were also common among the cohort.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/research-and-development/health-studies/gulf-war-veterans-health-study>

Australian Gulf War Veterans' Health Study – Follow Up Health Study (2015)

Authors: Sim, M., Clarke, D., Forbes, A., Glass, D., Gwini, S., Ikin, J., Kelsall, H., McKenzie, D., Wright, B., McFarlane, A., Creamer, M., Horsley, K.

The Australian Gulf War Veterans' Health Follow Up Study was a longitudinal cohort study that built upon the findings of the 2003 baseline study. As in the 2003 study, the 2015 Follow Up Study aimed to examine the physical, psychological and social health and military-related exposures of ADF veterans who served in the Gulf War as compared to ADF personnel who had not served in the Gulf War. All 1,456

participants of the baseline study were eligible to participate, and 715 Gulf War veterans participated in the Follow Up Study.

The Follow Up Study found Gulf War veterans remained at an increased risk for PTSD, 12-month alcohol disorder and general psychological distress when compared to the comparison group. The difference in risk for these factors between Gulf War veterans and the comparison group widened since the baseline study. The risk of major depression was not significantly different between study groups and both groups were found to be equally resilient.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/consultation-and-grants/research-and-development/health-studies/australian-gulf-war-veterans-follow>

Mental Health in the Australian Defence Force – 2010 ADF Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study (2010)

Authors: McFarlane, A.C., Hodson, S.E., Van Hooff, M., Davies, C.

The ADF Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study was conducted by a collaborative research team comprising representatives from the Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies at the University of Adelaide, the Joint Health Command of the ADF and the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne.

The study examined the prevalence rates of the most common mental disorders, the optimal cut-offs for relevant mental health measures, and the impact of occupational stressors. ADF prevalence rates were compared to an Australian sample matched for age, sex and employment. Nearly 49% of ADF current serving members participated in the study between April 2010 and January 2011.

Prevalence of mental disorders was similar to the Australian community sample, but profiles of specific disorders in the ADF varied. The study identified PTSD as the most prevalent anxiety disorder, with ADF males experiencing PTSD at a significantly higher rate than the general community. ADF males also experienced higher rates of affective disorders than the control sample and both ADF males and females experienced 12-month depressive episodes at higher rates than the general community. Alcohol disorders were significantly lower in ADF personnel than the control sample in the 12 months preceding the study.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/Health/DMH/Docs/MHPWSReport-FullReport.pdf>

Mothers in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) Study (2014)

Authors: Lawrence-Wood, E., Jones, L., Hodson, S., Crompvoets, S., McFarlane, A., Neuhaus, S.

The MEAO Study examined the impacts of deployment on female veterans with dependent children. Using a mixed methods design, the study collected standardised self-reported data and qualitative information from participants. The main finding of the study indicated that while the experience of deployment is particularly challenging for female veterans with dependent children, most participants viewed their deployment as a positive and important element of their service. The resilience, creativity and agency of female veterans was key to successfully navigating the demands of motherhood and deployment.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/about-dva/publications/research-and-studies/health-research-publications/mothers-middle-east-area>

Vietnam Veterans' Family Study (2014)

The Vietnam Veterans' Family Study was conducted by a research panel commissioned by DVA. The study comprised a number of complimentary research projects that aimed to determine the effect, if any, that active Vietnam service had on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the sons and daughters of Australian Vietnam veterans. The study cohort comprised 27,000 participants including Vietnam veterans, their partners and children and a control group of veterans (and their children and partners) who served in the ADF during the Vietnam War era, but were not deployed to Vietnam. The study found the majority of children of Vietnam veterans were in good health. However, children of Vietnam veterans (as compared to children of veterans who were not deployed to Vietnam) were more likely to experience depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal thoughts and planning, skin conditions, migraines and sleep disturbances.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/research-and-development/health-studies/vietnam-veterans-family-study>

Timor-Leste Family Study (2012)

Authors: McGuire, A., Runge, C., Cosgrove, L., Bredhauer, K., Anderson, R., Waller, M., Kanesarajah, J., Dobson, A., Nasveld, P.

The Timor-Leste Family Study was conducted by The University of Queensland, Centre for Military and Veterans' Health and funded by DVA. The study aimed to determine the physical, mental and social health impacts and associated risk and protective factors of deployment to Timor-Leste on the families of service members. The study involved 4,186 participants comprising veterans deployed to Timor-Leste between 1999 - 2010 and their partners as well as a control group of veterans who were not deployed to Timor-Leste (and their partners).

The study found no statistically significant differences were found between the physical, mental or family health of family members of people deployed to Timor-Leste when compared with comparison group family members.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/research-and-development/health-studies/timor-leste-family-study>

Rwanda Deployment Health Study (2014)

Authors: Runge, C., Kanesarajah, J., Loos, C., Waller, M., Nasveld, P.

The study was commissioned by DVA and conducted by the Centre for Australian Military and Veterans' Health. The aim of the study was to examine the health and compensation history and outcomes of veterans of Rwanda deployments (Operation TAMAR (Troops and Medical Aid Rwanda)). The study sample included 680 veterans of Operation TAMAR. Major findings included: half of participating veterans had an accepted compensation claim, with 31% having a claim or treatment for PTSD; medical personnel had fewer compensation claims and medical presentations than rifle company and support

personnel; claims were mainly lodged around the time of discharge not at incident; the majority accepted 11-15 years after the deployment.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/research-and-development/health-studies/rwanda-deployment-health-study>

Peacekeepers' Health Study

Authors: Hawthorne, G., Korn, S., Creamer, M.

The Peacekeepers' Health Study examined the long-term effects on mental health status, health service use and quality of life of peacekeeping or peacemaking deployments among Australian veterans. The study involved over 1,000 participants from seven United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions between 1989 and 2002, who had transitioned out of full-time service in the Australian Defence Force. Major findings included: most peacekeepers reported they were in good, very good or excellent health, though 30% of participants had at least one diagnosable mental health condition.

The published study is available from:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/research-and-development/health-studies/peacekeepers-health-study>

Hospitals providing trauma recovery programs

The document available from the following web page provides a list of providers delivering Trauma Recovery Programs to veterans.

<https://at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/client-resources/trauma-recovery-programs>