



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

## Mental Health and the Military Experience



# > SUPPORTING RESOURCES

## Tips for the Effective Assessment, Treatment and Management of Substance Abuse Amongst Veterans

This document highlights some additional resources to help support veterans affected by substance abuse.

### Substance abuse specific resources

#### The Right Mix website

The Right Mix website helps serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members better manage their alcohol consumption with information, strategies and online tools. It includes information on how to maintain a healthy balance with alcohol as well as self-help strategies and motivational goal setting to promote behaviour change.

<https://www.therightmix.gov.au/>

#### ON TRACK with the Right Mix app

The ON TRACK app helps serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members keep track of their alcohol consumption in real time and find out what it is costing them financially and physically. It is free to download from the App Store (iOS) and Google Play (Android).

<http://at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans/resources/mobile-apps/on-track-app/>

#### 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 site use the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology.

There is a specific report on substance use disorder available here:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/evidence-compass/substance-use-disorder>

## Treatment services for veterans

### ADF Post-Discharge GP Health Assessment

All former serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) can access a 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 is to help GPs identify and diagnose the early onset of physical and/or mental health problems among former serving ADF members. This tool includes screening tools for sleep disturbances, alcohol use, substance use, posttraumatic stress disorder and psychological distress, as well as information on how to access other DVA services that their patient may be eligible for. Ask your GP for further information.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/)

### Non-Liability Health Care

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) can pay for treatment of certain mental health conditions without the need for the conditions to be accepted as related to service. This is known as non-liability health care. The conditions covered are:

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- Depressive Disorder
- Anxiety Disorder
- Alcohol and Substance Use disorders.

Non-liability health care is available to anyone who has served as a permanent member of the ADF.

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/treatment-your-health-conditions>

### DVA Provider Panel

DVA has established a panel of community-based providers to treat eligible members of the veteran community who are experiencing alcohol and other substance use disorders. To access services through these arrangements, individuals must be eligible for treatment and referred through either a medical practitioner (for instance, a GP), the VVCS, a hospital discharge planner or other DVA allied mental health provider. A written referral is required.

No prior approval is required for the contracted facilities on this list: <http://at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/files/2017/01/Alcohol-Other-Substance-Use-Community-Based-Treatment-Panel-Nov-2016.pdf>

Further information about the Provider Panel is available at: [www.dva.gov.au/providers/dva-provider-news/expanding-veterans-access-treatment-alcohol-and-substance-use-disorders](http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/dva-provider-news/expanding-veterans-access-treatment-alcohol-and-substance-use-disorders)

### Non-Panel Facilities

If you are selecting a residential facility or group day program that is not on the DVA Provider Panel, you are required to get prior approval accompanied with clinical justification why the client cannot attend one of the contracted facilities.

Prior approval requests can be sent to [health.approval@dva.gov.au](mailto:health.approval@dva.gov.au). The process is quicker if the request contains an outline of the program, a contact person at the facility (to confirm clinical suitability), full cost of program and details of clients situation (particularly if client will be travelling interstate to attend a program).

## **Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service**

VVCS provides free and confidential, nation-wide counselling and support for war and service-related mental health conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance and anger. Support is also available for relationship and family matters that can arise due to the unique nature of the military lifestyle.

VVCS has an integrated, 24/7 service delivery system, that includes counselling (individual, couple and family), group programs and after-hours telephone support. All VVCS clinicians maintain an understanding of military culture and work with VVCS clients to find effective solutions for improved mental health and wellbeing. If you have a client you consider may benefit from VVCS support, please call 1800 011 046 to discuss ([www.vvcs.gov.au](http://www.vvcs.gov.au)).

## **General clinical resources**

### ***At Ease Professional website***

DVA's clearinghouse 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.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/](http://www.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.

<http://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. Users will learn about the case formulation approach, and have the opportunity to hear from experts, watch demonstrations of case formulation, and then practice case formulation based on veteran case studies.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/professional-development](http://www.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. The program was developed in partnership with Phoenix Australia: Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and is hosted on the RACGP's *glearning* system. The program is free to RACGP members and participants will accrue CPD points upon completion.

### ***Mental Health Advice Book***

This book draws upon the latest Australian and international best practice guidelines for the treatment of common mental health problems and aims to update practitioners who regularly treat veterans, as well as inform those who may be less familiar with veterans' mental health issues.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/mental-health-advice-book/mental-health-advice-book-introduction](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/mental-health-advice-book/mental-health-advice-book-introduction)

### ***Veteran Mental Health Consultation Companion mobile app***

The *Veteran Mental Health Consultation Companion* (VMHC2) is a free application for tablet devices, designed to assist mental health practitioners in the evidence-based assessment and treatment of their veteran patients. It contains interactive psychometric and assessment measures (including the PTSD Checklist), details of referral pathways and recommended treatments. The app also contains a range of clinical resources and patient handouts.

Please note that, due to technical issues, VMHC2 is currently only available for Apple devices.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/clinical-resources/vhmc2\\_app](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/professionals/clinical-resources/vhmc2_app)

### ***Beyond The Call***

This collection of stories shares the experiences of Australia's veteran community and the challenges faced by veterans and their families every day.

[www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans/resources/beyond-the-call-stories](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans/resources/beyond-the-call-stories)

### ***High Res (High Resilience) mobile app***

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

<https://at-ease.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/home>

## 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>