



Media Release

Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC
Special Minister of State

Tuesday, 1 July 2014

VA041

STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR FORMER ADF MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

Today the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson, announced three major initiatives which expand existing mental health services for veterans and their families.

From today, eligible veterans will have access to treatment for alcohol and substance use disorders and be able to access treatment for certain conditions without the need to make a claim for compensation from the Australian Government. Counselling services will also be expanded to more veterans and family members.

"Tackling the mental health challenges facing veterans and their families is a key pillar of the Government's plan for Veterans' Affairs. The funding for treatment is demand driven, and it is not capped." Senator Ronaldson said.

Firstly, there will be greater access to DVA's payment for mental health treatment, whether or not the mental health condition is related to service.

Currently, these arrangements cover diagnosed posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. DVA will now also pay for treatment for diagnosed alcohol and substance use disorders, and an increased number of individuals with peacetime service only will also become eligible.

Secondly, the Government has broadened the accessibility of counselling and support services provided by the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) with an expansion to client eligibility.

In addition to those already eligible for support, current and former serving members who have border protection service, served in a disaster zone either in Australia or overseas, served as a submariner, were involved in training accidents resulting in serious injury or were medically discharged are now eligible for VVCS.

Access to VVCS services are also available to partners and their dependent children, up to the age of 26, of these newly eligible service men and women. Additionally, the partners, dependent children aged up to 26, and parents of members killed in service-related incidents are eligible for VVCS support.

Finally, in an effort to promote early intervention and prevention, all former serving personnel are now able to access a comprehensive health assessment from their GP. A Medicare rebate is available for this health assessment.

"This comprehensive health assessment will help your GP to diagnose and identify early any mental or physical health conditions you may be experiencing. Your GP will then be able to treat you or refer you to other services," said Senator Ronaldson.

Over the next four years, the Department of Veterans' Affairs will spend more than four times the amount on mental health than it will on commemorating the Anzac Centenary. That is \$145 million

on the Centenary programme for 2014-2018, compared with the more than an estimated \$664 million to be spent on mental health services over this same period.

“With over 72,500 men and women having served this nation overseas since 1999, we must ensure that this nation does not repeat the mistakes it made post Vietnam.”

If you identify a member of the veteran and ex-serving community who you think may benefit from VVCS services, please encourage them to call **1800 011 046** to discuss their eligibility and support options.

Media inquiries: Minister Ronaldson: Brad Rowswell 6277 7820 or 0417 917 796
Department of Veterans' Affairs Media: 02 6289 6203

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) and Veterans Line can be reached 24 hours a day across Australia for crisis support and free and confidential counselling. Phone 1800 011 046 (international: +61 8 8241 4546)

2

Subscribe to media releases at minister.dva.gov.au/subscribe.htm