



RSL
Tasmania



11 August, 2022

Dear Defence Family,

As you may be aware, the interim report from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is now publicly available. I think it is only prudent that I provide a brief comment on the report, as I am sure over the coming days there will be much discussion.

At times I have found parts of the Royal Commission Block 6 in Hobart very distressing. Some of the lived experiences of veterans and their families has been nothing short of harrowing. I will be honest and say there have been moments where this has brought me to tears. I have stood beside many warriors on battlefields and witnessed great bravery, and I can assure you what I heard as part of the evidence presented at the Royal Commission by defence family members telling their story's is equally as brave. Like you I am very proud of them for telling their story so that we can make change happen.

The Royal Commission has made 13 recommendations that must be implemented as soon as possible. We cannot let this opportunity pass. Change must happen.

Firstly, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) claims process is completely broken. It is complex, slow and bureaucratic. Too many veterans in great strife are waiting too long for resolution of their claims. This system will require political will and leadership to change. Veterans generally end up making claims in times of great stress; **28.9% of transitioned ADF members felt life was not worth living¹**. Lengthy complex delays are compounding this issue. I am not blaming hard working DVA staff, they are following a government process, but with **21.2% of transitioning ADF staff feeling so low that they thought about committing suicide¹**, surely we cannot wait until the end of the Royal Commission to change. We must act now. **2% of transitioning ADF members have attempted Suicide¹**. Enough is enough!

The second issue is funding; veterans are currently covered under a Federal mandate and their families under the State government. The current system of funding for veterans and their families, needs an overhaul. If a veteran commits suicide, the effect to the community is immense. **Each death by suicide directly or indirectly impacts approximately 135 people¹**. The Federal government must work more closely with the States so that on the ground, the delivery of mental health services is seamless.

Funding for veterans also needs to be holistic, **we owe it to them to provide a fully funded, wide-ranging system that supports their lifetime wellbeing, gives them agency over their support needs, and does not require them to focus on their illness. This system should empower veterans to prosper, rather than limit their opportunities to contribute to society¹**. What was clear from all veterans who gave evidence was they all wanted to help others and ensure no one else had the same experience as they did.

Note 1. These quotes in *italics* are the words of the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

It is time for our political leaders to show the same courage and fortitude as our defence family. ***We recognise that there are difficulties associated with the policy decisions required to reform the legislative system, including how to harmonise the multitude of payments and services ..however, difficult policy decisions should not be a barrier to reform¹.***

The Royal Commission is on the right road, and we must all now be brave to ensure they are given the tools and teeth to succeed. We must not wait until the end of commission to begin some of these very urgent reforms. We owe this to our defence family.

Kind Regards,

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