

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR VETERAN COMMUNITY

On the eve of World Mental Health Day, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, has encouraged members of the veteran community to seek appropriate help for mental health issues.

Mr Griffin said the VVCS - Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service provided counselling and group programs to Australian veterans, peacekeepers, their families and eligible Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel.

"Some veterans and their family members experience mental health problems as a result of their Service. I urge any veteran or veterans' family member who wants more information about improving their mental health to contact the VVCS on 1800 011 046," Mr Griffin said.

"Even if you are dealing with my Department on compensation or other matters, don't wait to address your mental health issues. VVCS is a free, confidential and responsive service that can provide you with the support you need when you need it most."

Mr Griffin said World Mental Health Day provided an opportunity to reach out, not only to veterans, but also to widows, wives, partners, children and mates.

"Almost 50,000 veterans have a mental health disability, so I understand that the treatment of illnesses such as PTSD and related conditions is very close to the hearts of those in the ex-service community."

Mr Griffin said the Government was doing more now to assist veterans and transitioning ADF members with mental health-related problems, than ever before in the history of Australia's participation in conflicts and peace operations.

"In addition to the \$145 million spent on veteran's mental health annually, the Government has allocated \$92 million over four years to better meet the mental health needs of veterans and current and former serving members of the ADF, including \$9.5m to my Department to implement recommendations from Professor Dunt's Independent Study into Suicide in the Ex-service community," Mr Griffin said.

Other initiatives include \$5.5 million for the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health to develop ADF and veteran-specific mental health initiatives, more free Operation Life suicide prevention workshops for people who are concerned about family, friends, mates or others in the veteran and ex-service community. The At Ease website (<http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/> www.at-ease.dva.gov.au) also provides veteran-specific information on common mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance misuse, and links to mental health services and other resources.

"These programs demonstrate the Government's commitment to mental health awareness and treatment across the veteran community. However, there is always be more that can be done, and we will continue to do more."

World Mental Health Day raises public awareness about mental health issues. The Day promotes more open discussion of illnesses, and investments in prevention and treatment services. For more information, visit <http://www.wfmh.org> www.wfmh.org. Tomorrow (Saturday) is also National PTSD Awareness Day and Mr Griffin will speak at King's Park (near the Carillion), Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra, from 1.50pm.

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The VVCS - Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 1800 011 046.