



Australian Government
Defence and Veterans' Service Commission



Commissioner's Advisory Group

Terms of Reference

June 2026

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Purpose

The Defence and Veterans' Service Commission (DVSC) was established on 29 September 2025. Its role is to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members by overseeing reforms and providing independent, evidence-based advice to the Australian Government.

The Commissioner's Advisory Group (the Group) will comprise non-statutory members with lived experience and members with deep technical knowledge and relevant expertise. It will provide diversity of thought and non-binding advice to the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner (the Commissioner) to support their role.

The purpose of the Group is to advise the Commissioner on issues relating to the Commissioner's functions (as legislated in the *Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Act 2026*). The Commissioner's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

1. Monitoring, inquiring into and reporting on matters including:
 - data and trends regarding suicide and suicidality among serving and ex-serving ADF members
 - systemic factors related to the Australian Government's administration of policies, programs, systems and practices that contribute to suicide and suicidality among serving and ex-serving ADF members, and
 - the state of the Defence and veteran ecosystem, as it relates to the prevention of suicide and suicidality.
2. Inquiring into and reporting on the Australian Government's implementation of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.
3. Promoting understanding of suicide risks for Defence members and veterans, and factors that can improve their wellbeing, including through engaging with people with lived experience and the families of serving and ex-serving ADF members.
4. Improving supports for serving and ex-serving ADF members, conducting inquiries and providing advice on matters requested by the Minister, and working collaboratively with Coroners to understand issues contributing to Defence and veteran deaths by suicide.

Group Responsibilities

The key function of the Group is to provide expert, confidential and timely advice to the Commissioner on matters within the Commissioner's functions, including (but limited to):

- data trends, research and relevant developments
- concerns within the Defence and veteran ecosystem impacting suicide prevention
- suggestions and priorities for future inquiries
- potential recommendations for improvement
- ways to effectively engage and communicate with different interested parties
- the implementation of recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
- reviewing DVSC materials and reports where requested
- providing subject matter expertise related to suicide prevention, suicide risk and protective factors and postvention strategies
- practical advice on identifying systemic issues and strengthening reforms within the Defence and veteran ecosystem, and
- other issues as requested by the DVSC.

Members will support the Group to fulfil this role by:

- actively participating in all Group meetings
- reviewing all papers and materials relevant to meeting agenda items
- working collaboratively and respectfully with the Commissioner and other members of the Group
- providing verbal feedback to the Commissioner during meetings, and
- providing written feedback out of session to DVSC as required.

The Group's responsibilities are solely advisory in nature, and its recommendations are non-binding. The Group is not authorised to act on behalf of, or represent, the DVSC, the Commissioner, or the Australian Government.

Authority

The Group is established by the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner under the authority of the Commissioner's Advisory Group Terms of Reference. The Group is a non-statutory body.

Membership

Membership of the Group will include up to twelve (12) non-government members comprising:

- up to six (6) individuals with lived experience relevant to the Commissioner's functions, including lived experience familiarity with issues surrounding Defence and veteran suicide, mental health and wellbeing. This includes family members lived experience, and
- up to six (6) suitably qualified specialists with deep technical or professional knowledge and a broad range of skills and experience related to advising on suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving ADF members.

The Commissioner has the discretion to limit or expand membership of the Group.

Additional seats on the Group may be filled by Commonwealth agency standing members with research, data, or other relevant subject matter responsibilities. These standing member agencies will be invited to nominate an agency representative with appropriate skills, knowledge and experience of relevance to the Group's Terms of Reference.

Group members are appointed by the Commissioner following a public Expression of Interest process. The Commissioner will appoint (non-statutory appointment) individuals who bring a mix of professional skills, experience and expertise. This includes including those with relevant subject matter expertise in suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes within the Defence and veteran ecosystem, or related lived experience.

Group members may include individuals from relevant peak bodies, businesses, professions, academia, and not-for-profit organisations. If such members are appointed following the expression of interest process, they will be participating in the Group as an individual and will not be considered to be participating as a formal representative of their organisation.

Group members will have demonstrated relevant specialist, professional, technical, or lived expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- Lived experience of Defence and veteran suicide, mental health and wellbeing
- Suicide prevention and/or postvention
- Biostatistics and/or data management and analysis
- Reputable and relevant academic research
- Evaluation of suicide prevention and wellbeing programs
- Mental health intervention and treatment and/or
- Suicide prevention and/or wellbeing within the Defence and veteran ecosystem.

Group members (other than standing members) are initially appointed to serve a continuous term of two years. The Commissioner may offer to extend membership by no more than one year. The Commissioner can revoke membership at any time and may choose to alter the composition and structure of the Group as required.

Members may resign from the Group at any time by notifying the Group's Secretariat in writing.

Group Member Selection

Group members will be selected with consideration given to their expertise, professional standing and experience, taking into account sector, diversity, geographical and gender representation. Group members will be expected to contribute high quality and accurate evidence-based advice to the Commissioner.

It is also desirable for members to display the following qualities:

- experience participating in high level committees or forums (particularly for specialist members)
- professional communication and engagement skills (particularly for specialist members)
- ability to work collaboratively
- ability to positively contribute expert advice to the oversight of reforms in the Defence and veteran ecosystem
- openness to identifying and exploring new ideas and opportunities to effect evidence-based improvements.

Potential members may be required to undertake a police check and declare any relevant personal interests to inform the selection process.

Members will be asked to agree to the Commissioner's Advisory Group's Membership Expectations Agreement, found at **Appendix A**.

Confidentiality

Information made available to members through their membership of the Group, is confidential.

Members must not disclose confidential information to any person other than current members of the Group, without prior approval in writing from the DVSC. In giving written approval, the DVSC may impose such terms and conditions as it sees fit.

As discussions of the Group are likely to be confidential and potentially sensitive the DVSC does not consent to the meetings being electronically recorded by members. Accessibility requirements can be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

Membership of the Group is not considered confidential information for the purposes of these Terms of Reference, with the exception of lived experience members who may not wish to disclose

their full identity or experience publicly. Membership of the Group (unless otherwise agreed with the DVSC) will be published on the DVSC website. A short communication will also be published on the DVSC website after each meeting.

Conflict of Interest

Members must declare in writing to the Group's Secretariat any existing or potential conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to the work of the Group and propose steps they will take to address the conflict. Members should consider current and past employment, family and friend connections, and consultancy arrangements when making these declarations. This will be a standing agenda item for each meeting.

The Commissioner may propose steps to manage a conflict of interest and must be satisfied there are sufficient processes in place to manage any existing or potential conflicts of interest for a representative's membership to continue.

The Commissioner may determine that members, and any other invitees, may be excluded from participating in discussion on items where there are existing or potential conflicts of interest.

Members must notify the Group's Secretariat in writing of any actual or potential conflicts of interest as they arise.

Members must refrain from promoting their membership of the Group in any way that could reasonably be perceived as leading to real or potential financial gain to them or others. This includes situations where a member may use their membership to promote consultancy or other fee for services work.

Meetings

The Group will meet three times each financial year, with meetings to be scheduled by the Group's Secretariat. The Commissioner may seek advice from Group members out-of-session if required.

Group meetings will be held in-person or via videoconference. In-person meetings will be held in Canberra, or at an alternative location to be determined by the Commissioner.

Meetings of the Group will be chaired by the Commissioner, or Deputy Commissioner. Agenda papers will be distributed by the Group's Secretariat via email prior to each scheduled meeting as required.

Meetings will be conducted in a trauma informed manner to the extent possible, considering the principles of Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration, and Empowerment. Lived experience members may be engaged by the DVSC in advance of meetings to support trauma informed participation.

Members will have the opportunity to contribute to the agenda through an agenda nomination process. The DVSC will be responsible for issuing the agenda, related paperwork and for providing secretariat services to the Group.

A Group member cannot appoint a proxy or alternative person to fulfil their membership responsibilities. A Commonwealth entity standing member organisation member may send a proxy where the individual has the appropriate technical and organisational knowledge and prior agreement has been obtained from the Group's Secretariat.

The Commissioner, in consultation with Group members, may invite guest speakers, non-members or observers to Group meetings.

Sitting Fees

Sitting fees for Group members who are **not** representatives of a Commonwealth Government standing member entity will be paid at rates determined by the DVSC commensurate with the rates the *Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-time Public Office) Determination 2023*, Part 2, Section 12, Other holders of part-time public office.

Participation in the Group does not result in members being considered to hold a part-time public office.

To enable payment to be made, Group members must provide relevant financial details when requested.

Should travel be required for members' attendance at Group meetings, the Group's Secretariat will organise and directly pay for travel and accommodation for all Group members. Group members **must not** incur travel costs without prior written approval from the DVSC. Any costs incurred without prior written approval from the DVSC will not be considered for reimbursement.

Review of the Terms of Reference

The DVSC will regularly review the Terms of Reference, in consultation with members, to determine whether any amendments are necessary to accurately reflect the purpose, arrangements, and strategic direction of the Group at that time.

Membership Expectations Agreement

Members of the Commissioner's Advisory Group agree to participate in accordance with the below membership expectations.

Respectful engagement

1. I acknowledge that expertise comes from many sources and that all Group members should be respected when sharing their perspectives. This includes:
 - Using language that is respectful and inclusive – Consider how language can be helpful or harmful depending upon the context;
 - Allowing people the time to find the words and express what they want to say;
 - Listening attentively and minimising interruptions;
 - Avoiding language which is sensationalised; and
 - Avoiding sharing personal information of other people.

Preparation

2. I will familiarise myself with all materials circulated by the DVSC in advance of a Group meeting.
3. I will consider my personal wellbeing when attending Group meetings and engaging in potentially distressing discussions including but not limited to suicide, suicidality, mental health and wellbeing. When necessary, I will put strategies in place to protect my wellbeing.

Engagement

4. I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to attend all in-session meetings of the Group. Non-attendance will likely result in the proposed Sitting Fee not being paid.
5. I acknowledge that I may be asked to contribute to the Group in an out-of-session capacity. Not participating in out-of-session activities will not impact the payment of Sitting Fees for in-session activities. Participating in out-of-session activities will not, however, attract the payment of additional fees.

6. I acknowledge that meetings will be conducted in accordance with trauma informed principles of Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration and Empowerment to the extent possible.

Confidentiality

6. I acknowledge that the information made available to members by virtue of their membership of the Group is confidential information, and that I will not disclose confidential information to any person other than current members of the Group, without prior approval in writing from the DVSC.
7. I will not electronically record the meeting discussions without prior approval of the Commissioner.

Privacy

8. I acknowledge the importance of privacy for members of the Group, particularly for those sharing personal experiences, and members with lived experience. Outside of Group meetings, I will not attribute information obtained as part of participating on the Group, to individual Group members, the Commissioner, DVSC staff, or other attendees.