



Australian Government

Defence and Veterans' Service Commission



Corporate Plan

2025–26



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Commissioner's foreword



Penny McKay
Commissioner

The DVSC exists because of the voices of thousands – veterans, families, advocates and experts who called for a Royal Commission and for change and accountability. It was the key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide to establish the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission (DVSC). The Royal Commissioners envisaged an independent oversight agency to build system-wide oversight and accountability into the Defence and veteran ecosystem.

As the inaugural Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner, my mission is to honour those voices with action.

The DVSC commenced on 29 September 2025 as a new independent statutory body. The DVSC Corporate Plan 2025-26 sets out the direction of the DVSC. It outlines our operating context, strategic goals and values to guide us towards achieving our purpose to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for Defence members, veterans and their families.

Our vision for the future is clear. We will shine an enduring light on Defence member and veteran wellbeing to foster accountability, strengthen transparency and drive system-wide improvements, so those who serve our nation are treated with respect and live healthy and fulfilling lives – during and beyond their service. This vision – our north star – will guide all that we do.

A primary role for our Commission will be monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Australian Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The new *Defence and Veterans'*

Service Commissioner Act 2026 also gives the Commissioner the power to inquire broadly. Matters related to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of wellbeing for our Defence members, veterans and their families, will be on our radar.

Beyond the Royal Commission and their recommendations, the DVSC will endure. The DVSC will provide an ongoing spotlight on the state of the Defence and veteran ecosystem – including data and trends on suicide and suicidality among Defence members and veterans, and on systemic factors that contribute to Defence and veteran suicide and suicidality.

Our focus over the next four years is to inquire into issues and deliver high-quality advice and recommendations for improvement to the Australian Government. The 2026-27 year will be busy for us. We will:

- deliver our first progress report assessing the implementation of the Government response to both the Interim and Final Reports of the Royal Commission
- deliver our inquiry into Access to Information assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the Royal Commission interim recommendations 9-13, and
- commence and progress an independent Inquiry into Military Sexual Violence in the ADF.

We will also establish and meet with the first Commissioner's Advisory Group to ensure the Commission draws upon the valuable advice from people with relevant lived experience and expertise in issues impacting wellbeing in the Defence and veteran community.

Community, connection and lived experience are all central to our work. During our first months of operation, my focus has been on building strong foundations for the Commission and connecting with people across Australia and beyond who can inform our work. This has included active engagement with ex-service organisations, veterans, governments, community organisations, peak bodies, researchers and people who have sadly lost loved ones who have served to suicide. We learn from every interaction with every stakeholder. We will continue to connect across the Defence and veteran community to hear first-hand about how reforms are working (or not working) and issues impacting wellbeing of our service community.

As the Accountable Authority of The Defence and Veterans' Service Commission, I am pleased to present the 2025-26 Corporate Plan as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). This plan has been prepared for the 2025-26 reporting period and covers the 4-year period from 1 July 2025 through to 30 June 2029.

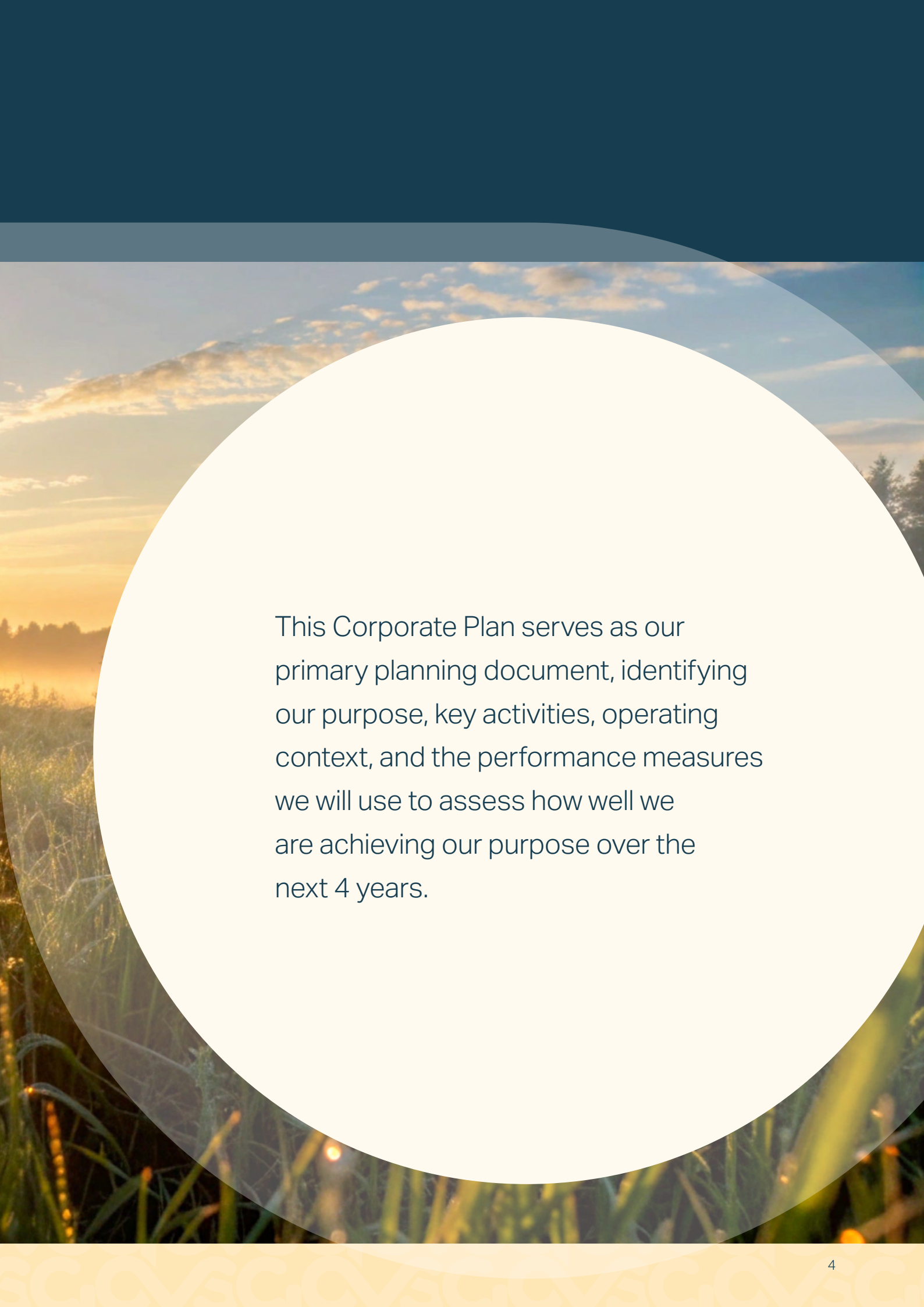
I'm honoured to be appointed as the inaugural Commissioner of the DVSC and look forward to delivering for Defence members, veterans and the Australian community.



Penny McKay
Commissioner
July 2026

Role of the Corporate Plan





This Corporate Plan serves as our primary planning document, identifying our purpose, key activities, operating context, and the performance measures we will use to assess how well we are achieving our purpose over the next 4 years.

About DVSC

Our Vision

We will shine an enduring light on Defence member and veteran wellbeing to foster accountability, strengthen transparency and drive system-wide improvements, so those who serve our nation are treated with respect and live healthy and fulfilling lives—during and beyond their service.

Our Purpose

To drive system-wide reform through evidence-based advice to the Australian Government and Parliament to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes among Defence members and veterans.

Our Culture

Our culture underpins our ability to influence and achieve outcomes for Defence members and veterans. We have been actively building strong foundations for the Commission in 2025-26. From the top to bottom of the organisation, there is a united commitment to delivering sustained improvement in suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for Defence members and veterans.

Values



Courage

We are courageous, in our pursuit to improve outcomes for veterans' and their families.



Compassion

We are compassionate, embedding trauma-informed and people-centred practices in all that we do.



Curiosity

We are curious in our approach, apply critical thinking and listen without judgement or assumption.



Influence

We are influential in delivering our work and driving meaningful and lasting change.



Integrity

We act with integrity to uphold the independence and credibility of the DVSC.

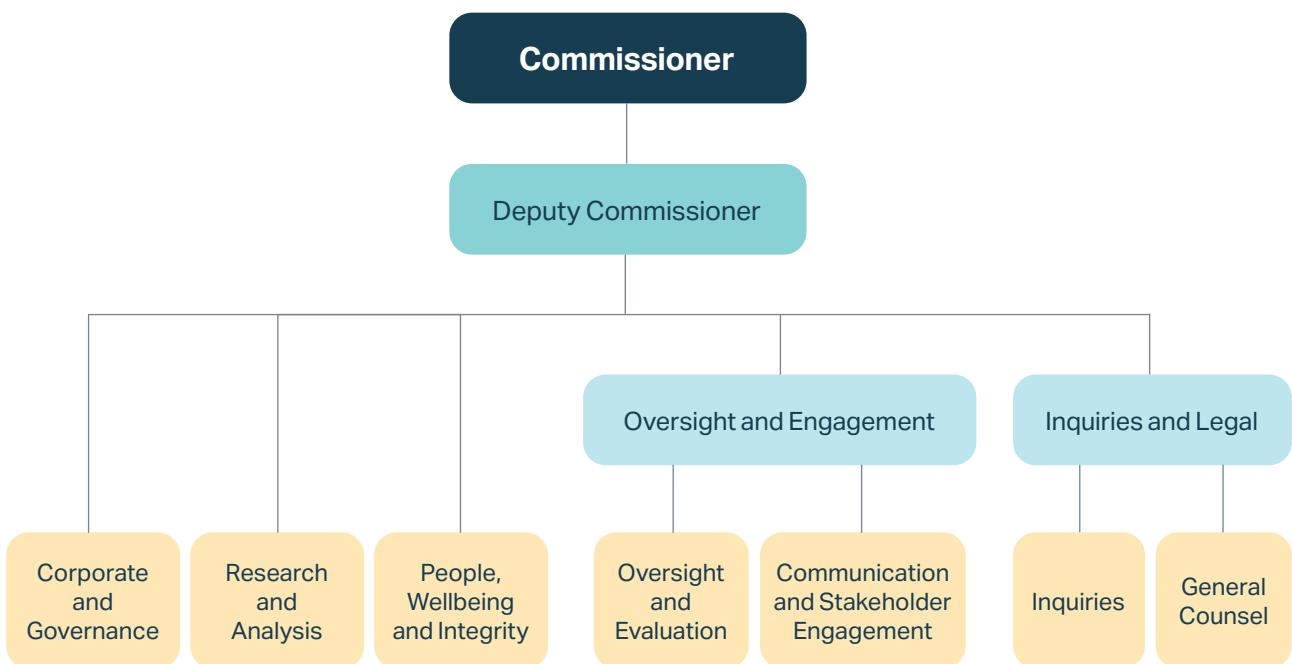
Our Structure

Organisational Structure

The Commissioner is the Accountable Authority of DVSC appointed by the Governor-General under section 72 of the *Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Act 2026* (DVSC Act). The Commissioner is directly supported by a Deputy Commissioner and two Assistant Commissioners with APS staff split into 7 teams.

DVSC's organisational structure is illustrated below.

Figure 1: DVSC Organisation Chart



The DVSC is governed by the Executive Committee (EC), consisting of the Commissioner and senior executives. The EC is the overarching leadership and management committee, that considers and provides advice on the strategic and operational priorities of the Commission.

Our Operating Context

Operating Environment

DVSC commenced operations on 29 September 2025 as a new, independent statutory entity established to implement Recommendation 122 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Recommendation 122: Establish a new statutory entity to oversee system reform across the whole Defence ecosystem. The Australian Government should establish a new statutory entity with the purpose of providing independent oversight and evidence-based advice in order to drive system reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members.

We operate across a broad Defence and veteran ecosystem that is undergoing significant reform in response to the Royal Commission. It is a large, geographically diverse and dynamic environment, sensitive to the demands of military service and community expectations.

Our role involves balancing our three key statutory functions including the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission recommendations, exercising our powers to independently inquire into issues impacting suicide prevention and wellbeing of serving and ex-serving members of our Defence Force, and promoting an understanding of suicide risk.

This shapes how we exercise our oversight role. We must target our resources to balance our functions to deliver timely, evidence-based advice to government to improve suicide and wellbeing while ensuring we conduct a thorough and robust inquiry process. As an extra-small new agency, we are building our people, systems and capabilities while establishing the independent and influential voice that Defence members, veterans and their families can trust.

Legislative Environment

The DVSC is an independent non-corporate Commonwealth entity. The DVSC's functions and independence are enshrined in the DVSC Act.

Our independence is assured by:

- **Section 12** which provides the Commissioner with complete discretion in the performance of functions and use of powers.
- **Section 72** which requires the Commissioner be appointed by the Governor-General following a publicly advertised merit-based selection process.

We also ensure our independence through maintaining a workforce of APS staff who are not members of the Defence force, nor APS staff members of the Department of Defence or the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and using systems that are independent to these agencies.

As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the DVSC also has responsibilities under other legislation, including the *Public Service Act 1999* and the *PGPA Act*.

Oversight and Cooperation

As an independent oversight entity, the DVSC will use its powers judiciously to inquire into the implementation of Royal Commission recommendations and issues impacting Defence member and veteran wellbeing. We will provide practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving suicide prevention and the wellbeing of Defence members and veterans. It will be important for the DVSC to build and maintain relationships of trust and influence with relevant government agencies as well as the broader Defence and veteran ecosystem, so our recommendations are accepted and implemented to the greatest effect.

Key Government Agencies

Our ability to influence system-wide reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes relies on close engagement with Commonwealth agencies, most importantly the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. These agencies have a frontline relationship with Defence members and veterans. We will work openly and transparently with these agencies to foster accountability and assess their effectiveness in addressing suicidality and suicide risks – in particular, the implementation of the Government's response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Key Non-Government Bodies

We recognise the quality and impact of our advice is strengthened through broad and meaningful collaboration with people on the ground in the Defence and veteran community and subject matter experts. We are committed to ensuring our work is informed by diverse perspectives and supported by the most current evidence, research and data available.

To achieve this, we will actively engage with leading non-government organisations, ex-service organisations, academics, and research bodies. As our plans for inquiries evolve, we will draw upon these relationships and clarify the scope and nature of our work.

Key Advisors

The DVSC is committed to listening to a diverse range of voices including those with lived experience of service, suicidality and life following service to inform our work. One way the DVSC will do this is through the establishment of Advisory Groups.

Our work will be supported by an ongoing Commissioner's Advisory Group (CAG), to be formally established in July 2026 with the first meeting to be held shortly thereafter. The CAG brings together people with lived experience and experts in relevant fields, to provide insights and perspectives to inform our work. The CAG will be a valuable sounding board for the Commissioner to help ensure our work is reflective of both lived experience and contemporary research and practices, bolstering the credibility and relevance of our advice.

Capabilities

People are our greatest asset. In the coming year, we will continue to have a strong focus on recruitment, capability building and wellbeing support. This will ensure the DVSC not only has the people with the right skills and expertise to deliver, but values consistent with our culture and support for their health and wellbeing.

We are committed to providing a safe work environment for our people and supporting their health, safety, and wellbeing. Recognising our role and the potential for our people to be exposed to confronting or traumatic content, we have systems and supports in place to support our people. These include:

- an employee assistance program
- mandatory training on vicarious trauma and mental health first aid, and
- proactive, regular psychological wellbeing checks.

We will continue to monitor the wellbeing of our people and provide additional supports where needed.



Our Performance Framework



Our Approach to Performance Measurement

Our performance framework defines our performance measures and targets. Our performance measures and targets are designed to provide a transparent view of our performance as it relates to delivery of our key activities and achievement of our purpose.

Key Activities



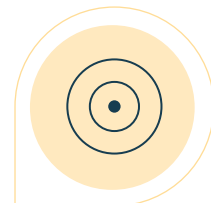
Significant areas of work that we will undertake to achieve our purpose.

Performance Measures



How we will measure and assess the achievements of our purpose.

Performance Targets



Planned performance levels that outlines the specific actions we will take to achieve our purpose.

Our Performance Framework

Our key activities and performance measures have been developed in line with better practice performance reporting approaches, guided by the following principles:

- **Clear read:** creates a clear, consistent, and trackable connection between the allocation of public resources to deliver planned performance across key activities, and the results being achieved in delivering DVSC's purpose.
- **Materiality:** the key activities are essential to the DVSC achieving its purpose, as assessed against our criteria.
- **Completeness:** purposes and key activities accurately represent our main goals.
- **Meaningfulness:** the performance information provides a clear, accurate and balanced picture of achievement, enabling the reader to assess the DVSC's performance in achieving its purpose.

Our performance measures are also guided by the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (PGPA Rule) to ensure they:

- relate directly to one or more of our key activities
- use sources of information and methodologies that are reliable and verifiable
- provide an unbiased basis for the measurement and assessment of our performance
- where reasonably practicable, comprise a mix of qualitative and quantitative performance measures
- include measures of our outputs, efficiency and effectiveness if those things are appropriate measures of our performance
- provide a basis for an assessment of our performance over time, and
- have specified targets where it is reasonably practicable to set a target.

Our Key Activities and Performance Measures

Our key activities, performance measures and targets are grounded in DVSC's key functions as stated in the DVSC Act.

Key Activity 1

Provide evidence-based advice to the Australian government on systemic reforms relating to suicide prevention and wellbeing among Defence members and veterans through monitoring, inquiring and reporting.

Performance measure 1.1

- a. Number of inquiries and publications delivered within committed timeframes
- b. Percentage of formal DVSC recommendations agreed by government

Planned performance levels

2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
a. NIL	a. 3	a. 3	a. 3	a. 3
b. NIL	b. 80%	b. 80%	b. 80%	b. 80%

Assessment scale for planned performance

Performance measure (a):

Met: Delivery of 100% of the target number of inquiries and publications committed to

Not met: Delivery of less than 100% of the target number of inquiries and publications committed to

Performance measure (b):

Met: 80% or higher

Substantially met: 50% to ≤80%

Not met: ≤50%

Planned performance rationale

- There are a number of factors that can influence why government may disagree with a recommendation. The percentage performance result should be interpreted in conjunction with an explanatory narrative, as government response to a DVSC recommendation may not be solely representative of the quality of the recommendation nor the Commission's influence.
- Publications include all formally published materials, including but not limited to inquiry reports. This key activity encompasses the work the DVSC undertakes more broadly to provide evidence-based advice.
- The scope and resources required to deliver each inquiry will vary, contributing to the number of inquiries expected to be delivered in a given year.

Key Activity 2

Inquire into the Australian Government's implementation of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Performance measure 2.1

Number of Royal Commission recommendations assessed for implementation and/or effectiveness.

Planned performance levels

2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
NIL	135 recommendations assessed	To be established through the forward work plan	To be established through the forward work plan	To be established through the forward work plan

Assessment scale for planned performance

For 2025-26: N/A

For 2026-27:

Met: 100%

Not met: less than 100%

For all remaining years:

Met: 100%

Substantially met: 80% to \leq 100%

Not met: less than 80%

Planned performance rationale

- The DVSC Act requires 2 inquiries to be conducted into the implementation of the Government response to the Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission recommendations. The first Progress Report to be delivered by 5 February 2027 and the second Progress Report to be delivered by 5 December 2030.
- As such, there is no target for 2025-26, and, for 2026-27, the target and assessment scale has been set by the DVSC Act.
- The number of recommendations expected to be assessed each financial year following 2026-27 is tied to a forward plan approved by the Commissioner at the commencement of each reporting cycle. If emerging issues result in changes to the plan, future year targets will be adjusted accordingly.

Key Activity 3

Promote understanding of suicide risks for Defence members and veterans, and factors that can improve support and wellbeing of Defence members and veterans, through collaboration and engagement.

Performance measure 3.1

- a. Number of engagements by engagement type
- b. Qualitative demonstration of DVSC's ability to achieve the key activity.

Planned performance levels

2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
a. Baseline to be established	a. Baseline to be established	a. As per the established baseline	a. As per the established baseline	a. As per the established baseline
b. Case study on the establishment of the DVSC	b. To be established	b. To be established	b. To be established	b. To be established

Assessment scale for planned performance

Performance measure (a):

Met: 90% or higher of engagements delivered across all types

Substantially met: 75% to ≤ 90% of engagements delivered

Not met: less than 75% engagements delivered

Performance measure (b):

Met: case study effectively demonstrates alignment to the key activity

Substantially met: case study partially demonstrates alignment to the key activity

Not met: case study does not demonstrate alignment to the key activity

Planned performance rationale

- Planned performance targets for performance measure (a) are to be established once DVSC determines the types (and quantity) of engagement that are core to achieving this key activity and can be meaningfully defined and reported against to measure performance. Once this baseline is established, the planned performance target for future years will then be set.
- Preliminary engagement types being considered for performance measure (a) include: senior leadership event attendance, speeches, roundtables, and official meetings (e.g. with community and ex-service organisations). Engagement types that meaningfully contribute to the key activity will be considered.
- The qualitative case study topic for performance measure (b) will be determined at the beginning of each reporting cycle to enable data requirements and collection processes to be set prior to commencement of operations for the reporting cycle.

Our Risk and Oversight Management

We recognise that risk is inherent in our work and can present both opportunities and threats to delivering our purpose. The nature of our work means that our staff, contractors, stakeholders and witnesses may be exposed to descriptions of lived experience involving suicide, suicidality, poor mental health, military violence and sexual violence. In this context, it is critical we have mitigations to manage the wellbeing of our people and those we engage with.

Risk management is integrated into DVSC's governance arrangements so that risk is a fundamental consideration in our everyday decision-making.

The Commissioner, as Accountable Authority, established the *DVSC Risk Management Policy and Framework* (RMPF). The RMPF sets out our approach and expectations for managing risk in line with the PGPA Act and *Commonwealth Risk Management Policy*.

The Audit and Risk Committee provide independent advice and assurance to the Commissioner on the appropriateness of our risk oversight and management systems, and systems of internal control.

Our Senior Executives act as role models for DVSC's risk culture, promoting and supporting active and intelligent risk management. All managers, staff and contractors have a responsibility to manage risk with an open and proactive approach, where risks are appropriately identified, assessed, communicated and managed.

The DVSC works with three levels of risk – enterprise, strategic and operational.

Our five key enterprise risks support the achievement of our purpose and are managed at a whole of DVSC level. Our defined strategic risks are managed on an ongoing basis by DVSC's senior leadership and regularly reported to the Audit and Risk Committee, and our operational risks represent the day-to-day management of risk throughout the DVSC's work.

Key Enterprise Risks	Risk Management Strategies
<p>1. DVSC does not influence system-wide reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for Defence members and veterans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Effective work planning and timely delivery including an ability to pivot as needed supported by clear and achievable performance measures b. Ensuring the advice provided to government is practical, evidence-based and achievable and can drive change within the Defence and veterans' ecosystem c. Building trusted relationships with relevant government agencies and the Defence and veteran community
<p>2. DVSC does not maintain its independence and integrity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Strong integrity and fraud frameworks, policies, tools and culture including active management of conflicts of interest and establishing a culture of integrity e. Data and information storage and handling systems supported by robust processes f. Promoting transparency and accountability in all the Commission does (as far as possible)
<p>3. DVSC does not meet its legislative obligations or acts outside legislative parameters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. Active management of an achievable workplan h. Compliance register with clear accountabilities and processes i. Clear and transparent financial and performance reporting j. Actively seeking internal and external legal advice
<p>4. DVSC does not engage and maintain the confidence of stakeholders, including the Defence and veteran community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> k. Recruitment or training of staff to effectively engage with key stakeholders including current and former ADF members and their families l. Professional ways of working that engender trust while maintaining independence m. Judicious and effective use of legislative powers n. Actively engaging with insights and advice from key advisors including through CAG and clearly and regularly communicating with the Defence and veteran community
<p>5. DVSC staff feel unsupported and the DVSC fails to maintain its capacity and capability to deliver on its purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o. Established ongoing training for key areas including data and psychosocial risk p. Effective shared services arrangement or MoU q. Effective workforce planning to deliver on objectives, including effective recruitment and related budget support r. Active and ongoing support for health and wellbeing of staff

Appendix 1

PGPA Rule s16 checklist

Topic	Requirements	Sections
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. a statement that the plan is prepared for paragraph 35(1)(b) of the Act; b. the reporting period for which the plan is prepared; c. the reporting periods covered by the plan. 	Commissioner's Foreword
Purposes	The purposes of the entity.	Our Purpose and Outcomes
Key Activities	For the entire period covered by the plan, the key activities that the entity will undertake in order to achieve its purposes.	Key Activity 1 Key Activity 2 Key Activity 3
Operating Context	For the entire period covered by the plan, the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the environment in which the entity will operate; b. the strategies and plans the entity will implement to have the capability it needs to undertake its key activities and achieve its purposes; c. a summary of the risk oversight and management systems of the entity, and the key risks that the entity will manage and how those risks will be managed; d. details of any organisation or body that will make a significant contribution towards achieving the entity's purposes through cooperation with the entity, including how that cooperation will help achieve those purposes; e. how any subsidiary of the entity will contribute to achieving the entity's purposes. 	Commissioner's Foreword Operating Context Capabilities Our Performance Framework Key Activity 1 Key Activity 2 Key Activity 3 Our Risk and Oversight Management Cooperation The entity has no subsidiaries
Performance	For each reporting period covered by the plan, details of how the entity's performance in achieving the entity's purposes will be measured and assessed through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. specified performance measures for the entity that meet the requirements of section 16EA; and b. specified targets for each of those performance measures for which it is reasonably practicable to set a target. 	Our Performance Framework Performance Measures Key Activity 1 Key Activity 2 Key Activity 3



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