



**The Hon. Scott Morrison MP**  
Prime Minister

**The Hon. Darren Chester MP**  
Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel

**Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash**  
Attorney-General  
Minister for Industrial Relations

## **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **ESTABLISHMENT OF A ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE**

The death of any Australian Defence Force member or veteran is one death too many and a tragedy that is deeply felt by all Australians. Tragically, and heartbreakingly, this includes death by suicide.

Recognising this, the Government will take the step of recommending to the Governor-General the establishment of a Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide, following a period of consultation on draft Terms of Reference, with the relevant community and state and territory governments.

The Royal Commission will complement the Government's existing initiative to establish a permanent National Commission to proactively deal with future issues, including taking on other recommendations of a Royal Commission.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Royal Commission will be set up after listening to community calls for a national inquiry focusing on the systemic issues faced by Australian Defence Force members and veterans that too often results in their loss of life to suicide.

"Suicide prevention is a key priority for the Federal Government," the Prime Minister said.

"We have always recognised that the rate of suicide of Australian Defence Force members and veterans is unacceptably high," the Prime Minister said.

"In recognising the sacrifices made by our serving and former members and their families on behalf of the nation, we owe it to members, veterans and their families to continue to take action."

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said the Royal Commission was another step in our efforts to build confidence, trust and hope for current and future veterans and their families that they will be supported.

"This will provide an opportunity for us all to reset, further increase our understanding of this issue, and unite the Parliament, the ex-service community, and the families who have been affected by suicide," Minister Chester said.

“As a nation we take great pride in the men and women who have served our nation in uniform, and as a Government we have committed to help them with any mental or physical issues that are a result of that service.”

The Attorney-General, Michaelia Cash said the Attorney-General's Department will provide administrative support to the Royal Commission.

"Reducing lives lost to suicide is a priority for the Morrison Government."

"Our aim for this Royal Commission is that it will shed light on the critical steps we need to take so that we can reduce these heartbreaking cases of suicide."

Crucially, the Royal Commission will not defer, delay or limit, in any way, any proposed or announced policy, legislation or regulation that we are currently implementing.

The Government intends that the Royal Commission and the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention will be established together and operate in a complementary way to achieve long-term change.

The Royal Commission will look at past deaths by suicide (including suspected suicides and lived experience of suicide risks) from a systemic point of view, while the National Commissioner will have a forward-looking role, including overseeing the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

The National Commissioner Bill currently before the Parliament will be amended to ensure their work complements the work of the Royal Commission and examines deaths by suicide in the defence and veteran community that occur after the Royal Commission has handed down their final report.

Given the complex issues for consideration, and the importance of hearing from Australian Defence Force members, veterans and their families, the Government envisages that three Commissioners will be needed to lead the inquiry. Consultation is underway to appoint these candidates.

Minister Chester will lead a public consultation process on the draft Terms of Reference and the Prime Minister will write to First Ministers inviting their contributions to the draft Terms of Reference with the view of a joint Commonwealth-State Royal Commission.

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring all the systems of support for our veterans and their families are working together, and importantly that when someone who may be struggling reaches out for help, which we are there to support them.

**[ENDS]**

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## **Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide – Themes for consultation**

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Terms of Reference will be determined in consultation with the defence and veteran community and states and territories. We expect that it will cover the following themes:

- Systemic issues and analysis of the contributing risk factors relevant to defence and veteran death by suicide, including:
  - o Contribution of pre-service, service (including training), transition and post-service issues
  - o The relevance of issues such as service, posting history and rank of the defence member or veteran
  - o The manner of the recruitment of the person into the Australian Defence Force
  - o The manner in which a person transitioned from the Australian Defence Force
  - o The availability, quality and effectiveness of health, wellbeing and support services
  - o How information about individuals is shared by and within the government.
  - o How matters of individuals' mental and physical health are captured during enlistment and during and after service.
  - o The quality and availability of support services for families, friends and colleagues affected by a defence and veteran death by suicide.
  - o The risk factors of defence members and veterans who have attempted or contemplated suicide or have other lived experiences of suicide.
- The protective and rehabilitative factors for defence members and veterans who have attempted or contemplated suicide or have other lived experiences of suicide.
- The engagement of defence members and veterans with Commonwealth, State or Territory Governments about support services, claims or entitlements.

The Royal Commission will be asked to make any recommendations, including recommendations about any policy, legislative, administrative or structural reforms.

The Royal Commission will be asked to have regard to:

- Previous relevant reports and inquiries.
- The work of the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.
- The support available to members and veterans of other defence forces, particularly in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- The role of government and non-government organisations
- Support services for families and others impacted by defence and veteran death by suicide
- Opportunities to promote the understanding of suicide risks and protective factors in the defence and general community.

The Royal Commission will not be required to inquire into matters that it is satisfied have been dealt with by other inquiries, investigations or criminal or civil proceedings. Further, it will not be required to make findings of civil or criminal wrongdoing or findings about individual defence and veteran deaths by suicide.

The Royal Commission will be asked to focus on systemic issues, recognising that they will be informed by individual experiences and may need to make referrals to appropriate authorities.

The Royal Commission will be asked to recognise that its inquiries, including its findings and recommendations, will provide a foundation for the future work of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.