

NSW Veterans Strategy

2021-2022 Progress Report



A guide to acronyms

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice (NSW Government)
DCS	Department of Customer Service (NSW Government)
DOE	Department of Education (NSW Government)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet (NSW Government)
DPIE	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (NSW Government)
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs (Australian Government)
ESO	Ex-Service Organisation
NCVH	National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare
OLG	Office of Local Government (NSW Government)
OOS	Office of Sport (NSW Government)
OVA	NSW Office for Veterans Affairs (NSW Government)
RSL NSW	The Returned and Services League of Australia (NSW Branch)
SES	State Emergency Service (NSW Government)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	NSW Training and Further Education (NSW Government)
TSY	Treasury (NSW Government)
VEP	Veterans Employment Program
WNSW	Women NSW (NSW Government)

Status of actions

	Action has been completed or is on track for completion
	Action has progressed, but is not yet complete
	Action has been cancelled or is no longer applicable to the Action Plan



Cover: Anzac Day March, Sydney, 2022. Photo by Salty Dingo
 Back cover: Remembrance Day, 2021. Photo by NSW Government

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Minister's Foreword



I am proud to present the NSW Government's Veterans Strategy Progress Report as a record of the first two-year Action Plan 2021–2022 achievements.

The NSW Government's Veterans Strategy and 2021–2022 Action Plan provide a whole of government and community approach for veterans and their families. The Plan brings together initiatives across government that aim to support veterans as they transition to civilian life, as well as events and commemorations that recognise the contribution and sacrifice of veterans; and protections for our military heritage, by ensuring that the stories of service are preserved.

The first year progress report provides a snapshot of the work that has been progressing across government to recognise and assist veterans, and highlights some of the key achievements of the past 12 months. I am particularly proud of our Veterans Employment Program that has been recognised with three Prime Minister's Awards for the work delivered in supporting veterans to transition to civilian employment in State and Local Government. We have exceeded our targets and developed excellent resources with TAFE NSW.

Other highlights include the opening of a new purpose-built space for the National Centre for Veterans Healthcare which continues to deliver world class facilities and programs. We have also collaborated with Service NSW to showcase information about government services available to veterans and their families and delivered new initiatives that highlight veterans' diversity.

In my role as Minister for Veterans, and as a veteran myself, I am honoured to represent the veterans' community and to acknowledge their important contribution to our State. The NSW Government has been able to further demonstrate its continued acknowledgement of veterans through its official recognition of War Widows' Day on 19 October and Kokoda Day on 3 November, which will ensure that these dates are highlights within our annual calendar of recognition. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the successes of the 2021–2022 Action Plan and look forward to the development of the 2023–2024 Action Plan, which will build on our commitments and grow initiatives to support veterans and their families.

THE HON. DAVID ELLIOTT MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT
MINISTER FOR WESTERN SYDNEY



The Hon David Elliott MP, Minister for Veterans (centre) and Caroline Mackaness, Director, NSW Office for Veterans Affairs, with Jonathan Cook, Deputy Consul-General of the Sydney British Consulate-General, at an Anzac Memorial service commemorating the 80th anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul* in May 2022. Photo by NSW Government

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

In continuing to honour the Australian men and women who have served or made the ultimate sacrifice, the NSW Government was pleased to lodge our submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide on the eve of Anzac Day 2022. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is a once in a lifetime opportunity for all levels of government, private organisations and charities to come together to end the tragic suicide rates related to the veteran population.

Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that suicide is the leading cause of death for young people, and among young ex-serving male personnel (aged 18-24 years), the rate of suicide is twice that observed for Australian men of the same age.

Approximately 1,200 veterans transition to NSW each year, with the majority settling in the Sydney metro region, and many returning or moving to regional NSW.

The NSW whole-of-government Veterans Strategy was launched in March 2021 and outlines the State's plans to help veterans better connect to services in NSW.

The NSW Government is committed to continuing to honour the contributions made by our servicemen and servicewomen over many generations and our submission called for improved services, support and financial assistance for our veterans and their families, including:

- The establishment of additional Veteran Wellbeing Centres in regional areas and in Southwest Sydney focused on the life journey of individual veterans post transition.
- More centralised and targeted financial assistance mandated for health, educational, social/recreational, legal and housing needs to address suicide risk factors like unemployment, poor family connections, food insecurity and lack of housing.
- One peak body to represent ex-service organisations and advance the broader interests of veterans.
- Increased involvement and presence of ex-service organisations like RSL NSW, Soldier On, and Mates4Mates at ADF bases and throughout the transition process.
- Improved real-time and legacy information sharing between the Commonwealth and States as well as data integration to better manage a veteran's transition to civilian life and monitor suicide risk.
- A dedicated concierge service for newly discharged veterans, similar to the fast-tracked support that is currently on offer at Services Australia and Service NSW.

The Commonwealth announced a one-year extension to the Royal Commission through to 17 June 2024. The NSW Government will continue to work with the veterans community and make further submissions to the Commission where necessary.

Overview

The flagship 2021 NSW Veterans Strategy (the Strategy) implemented a whole of Government and whole of community approach to the important role veterans play in NSW and the focus NSW will take to Veterans Affairs through to 2024. The development of the Strategy provided an opportunity to focus on what veterans need and want. We heard from veterans through surveys and focus groups, and reviewed research from across Australia and internationally to bolster existing, and create new, programs for veterans in NSW.

The NSW Government already delivered a range of programs targeted at recognising and supporting veterans, but this was the first time that the programs across the whole of Government and community were brought together in one place.

The Veterans Strategy Action Plans for 2021–2022 and 2023–2024 outline specific commitments and targets to achieve the Strategy goals. This report outlines the achievements against the 2021–2022 Action Plan. The new Action Plan will be launched for 2023–2024.

The Veterans Strategy at a glance

Focus	Outcome
1 RECOGNITION AND COMMEMORATION	<p>The service and sacrifice of every veteran is recognised across the state, in every community.</p> <p>Across NSW, commemoration brings communities together to recognise the service of veterans and their families, and to value the contribution they make to society.</p>
2 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT	<p>Veterans and their partners can participate in education and employment, in a way that recognises their service and sacrifice.</p> <p>Finding the right job or training is crucial for a rewarding civilian life. It also makes good business sense for organisations to access the skills and experience of well-trained veterans.</p>
3 COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERING	<p>Veterans are an active and valued part of our community.</p> <p>As well as benefiting the community, volunteering has personal benefits, as volunteers often experience reduced symptoms of depression and lower mortality, perceive their health to be better, and expand skills and networks.</p>
4 SUPPORT INITIATIVES	<p>Veterans with additional needs receive the support and services they require.</p> <p>Providing the right supports can require a flexible approach that reflects the diversity of veterans, their families, and their needs.</p>

Veterans in NSW

The 2021 Census included for the first time a question on past or present service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Data from the Census is providing a more accurate understanding of the demographics of ADF and veteran populations by state, gender, age, living arrangements, education, income, health and employment.

Preliminary assessment of the Census data shows that most ex-serving ADF members were doing as well as or better than the Australian population average on education attainment, employment, income, home ownership and social connection. However, some specific cohorts of veterans faced wellbeing challenges, those groups being:

- Those who separated from the ADF involuntarily for medical reasons
- Those who served fewer years, and
- Those who separated from the Navy¹

The Census also showed that approximately 127,000 veterans live in NSW alongside a further 18,000 currently serving ADF regular service personnel and 6,500 Reserves. One in twenty households reported at least one occupant who has served in the ADF, and across Australia, 55% of veterans live in a greater capital city with 45% living in a regional area. The largest regional populations of veterans in NSW are in the Shoalhaven, Newcastle, Gosford and Wyong areas.²

Every year an additional 5,500 ADF members separate from service, joining the Australian veteran community³. In NSW, 58,000 veterans are current clients of DVA along with 28,000 dependents and 14,000 widows⁴.

Australia's veteran population is ageing. The 70 to 74-year-old bracket is the most common current veteran age range with 16% of all NSW veterans falling into this group. The ageing population has implications for how veterans participate in the community and in commemoration activities. It also has implications for the organisations that support veterans, particularly older veterans.

For younger veterans, support and commemoration activities need to align with changing priorities and expectations to remain relevant and meaningful. The gender and ethnicity of the veteran population is slowly changing. The present female proportion of veterans is 13%, however, this figure will slowly rise over time as 21% of current ADF members and 19% of Reserves are female. Similarly, the present proportion of veterans that reported as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is 2.3% but this figure should rise slightly over time as the proportion of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ADF members is 3.7% (proportion of the general population reporting as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is 3%)⁵.

¹ "Understanding the Wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving ADF members", Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1 September 2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/veterans/wellbeing-characteristics-of-ex-serving-ADF/contents/about>

² "Service with the Australian Defence Force: Census", Australian Bureau of Statistics, Released 28/06/2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/service-australian-defence-force-census/latest-release>

³ "Department of Defence Annual Report 20-21", <https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/AR-2020-21.pdf>

⁴ "DVA Pensioners and Treatment Card Holders by Local Government Area as at 1 October 2022", Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/lgas_dec2021.pdf

⁵ "Service with the Australian Defence Force: Census", Australian Bureau of Statistics, Released 28/06/2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/service-australian-defence-force-census/latest-release>

Recognition and Commemoration

Outcome

The service and sacrifice of every veteran is honoured across the state, in every community.

The NSW Government with the RSL NSW, as well as other organisations has continued to play an important role in the delivery of a calendar of commemorative activities, including Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and commemorations of other conflicts and service (Korean and Vietnam Wars, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veteran Commemoration).

Following COVID-19 impacts, 2022 saw the return of unrestricted commemorative services. Receptions for Vietnam and Korean war veterans were held, and Anzac Day saw significant numbers gather for marches and commemorative services across NSW. The NSW Government also supported the conservation of 43 local memorials through the Community War Memorials Fund for the 2021–2022 financial year.

The emerging needs of more recent veterans has also been a focus of the Strategy. The Anzac Community Grants Program funded 52 projects in 2021 and funding was increased for the 2022–2023 grant round. A new event to recognise the service of women was developed and held annually since 2021, a pilot program was developed to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service and well over 50 stories of diverse service were published on the NSW War Memorial Register website.



Highlights

- In 2022 NSW communities were able to participate in Anzac Day Dawn Services and Marches throughout the state. The Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place Sydney was attended by over 5,000 spectators. Over 8,000 marchers participated in the Sydney CBD March, which saw tens of thousands of spectators line Elizabeth Street. The Anzac Day Commemoration Service also took place at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park attended by hundreds of people.
- The Anzac Memorial, OVA and the My Voice, My Journey pilot program developed an excursion for 17 Indigenous student leaders to visit the Anzac Memorial in 2022 for a special tour focused on recognising and commemorating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service. Vietnam War veteran and Bundjalung man, David Williams, spoke to the group about his experience of 30 years of service in the Royal Australian Navy.
- In partnership with Women NSW, OVA delivered two successful International Women's Day events for female veterans and current-serving ADF personnel at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park. The inaugural event on 8 March 2021 featured guest speaker Amanda Rose, a leadership expert and mentor for women in business. The 2022 event, held on 11 March 2022 as part of NSW Women's Week, featured guest speaker Jennifer Wittwer CSM FAHRI, ADF veteran, author and international expert on Women, Peace and Security.
- The announcement of NSW State recognition for War Widows' Day on 19 October, with a Reception held in Parliament, and Kokoda Day on 3 November will ensure these dates are highlights within our annual calendar of recognition going forward.

Left: Indigenous student leaders at the Anzac Memorial for the My Voice, My Journey pilot program. Photo by Michael Power
 Top: Dawn Service, Sydney, 2022.
 Below: International Women's Day event at the Anzac Memorial, 2022. Photos by Salty Dingo



THEME 1

Recognition and Commemoration

Status of Actions

No.	Action	Lead	Status
State-level commemoration			
1.1	Commemorative Events	OVA	An annual calendar of significant veterans' days is acknowledged every year in collaboration with the veteran community and communicated through the OVA and Anzac Memorial digital and social media channels.
1.1.1	Anzac Day	DPC	The NSW Government provides funding and resources to support the annual Anzac Day Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place Sydney and the Sydney CBD March which took place in 2021 adhering to COVID-19 restrictions, and in 2022 without restriction.
1.1.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Commemoration Service	OVA	The NSW Government provides funding and resources to support the delivery of the annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Commemoration Service at the Anzac Memorial. A school resource pack is produced and distributed to all three education sectors. Commemorations took place in 2021 adhering to COVID-19 restrictions and in 2022 without restriction.
1.1.3	Remembrance Day	DPC/ OVA	The NSW Government delivers the NSW Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place Sydney each year. A school resource pack is produced and distributed to each of the three education sectors. Services took place in 2021 adhering to COVID-19 restrictions and plans for 2022 are in place.
1.1.4	Korean and Vietnam War Receptions	DPC	In 2022 the Premier's Korean Veterans Reception and Premier's Vietnam Veterans Reception took place in August at Government House. The Receptions in 2021 did not take place due to COVID-19 restrictions.
1.1.5	Recognising Women	WNSW/ OVA	Successful events to support networking were held in 2021 and 2022 in partnership with Women NSW.
1.2	Anzac Memorial	OVA	Anzac Memorial operations and maintenance, as well as education, public programs and events are an ongoing action.
1.3	War Memorials Register	State Library/ OVA	OVA collaborated with Local Councils to help ensure that their war memorials are recorded in the War Memorials Register. This collaboration resulted in 31 new memorial listings added to the Register, across 14 Local Government Areas (LGAs). An additional 138 existing memorial listings have also been updated with new photos or information, across 29 LGAs.

No.	Action	Lead	Status
Community-based commemoration			
1.4	Heritage and History Action Plan – Community War Memorials	OVA	The collaboration with Local Councils resulted in information from 31 Councils about how their war memorials are listed under the heritage sections of their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). Fourteen of these Councils also identified memorials that are not currently listed on their LEPs but should be heritage listed at local, state, or national level. This information assists OVA to liaise with Councils on best-practice approaches for the protection and conservation of their heritage memorials and grants available through the Community War Memorials Fund.
1.4.1	Heritage and History Action Plan – Diverse Voices	OVA	Over 50 diverse stories were published on the NSW War Memorial Register website in 2021 and 2022 that reflected the service of female veterans, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service personnel, and contemporary service including peacekeeping.
1.5	Anzac Community Grants Program	OVA	The 2021 Anzac Community Grants Program provided funding to 52 projects throughout New South Wales communities to acknowledge our veterans and current serving members and their families. The 2022 Anzac Community Grants Program opened in September and closes on 11 November 2022.
Education and research			
1.6	Premier’s Anzac Memorial Scholarship	OVA	Two scholarship study tours were delivered in 2021 and 2022, with 36 students and 7 teachers participating from across NSW. The tours focused on war memorials, museums and significant military sites in Australia including locations in Sydney, Lithgow, Bathurst, Cowra, the ACT and Darwin.
1.7	School Education Resources	OVA/ Anzac Memorial	Two school resource packs were produced and distributed to the three education sectors in 2021 and 2022 to align with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commemoration Service in May, and Remembrance Day in November.
1.8	Recognising and Representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service	OVA/ Anzac Memorial	The Anzac Memorial, OVA and the My Voice, My Journey pilot program developed an excursion for 17 Indigenous student leaders to visit the Anzac Memorial in 2022 for a special tour focused on recognising and commemorating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service.
1.9	NSW Government Data	DCS	Data analysis informed the roll out of a pilot in the Central Coast region as well as collaboration with Ex-Service Organisations, see action 3.13.

Education and Employment

Outcome

Veterans and their partners can participate in education and employment, in a way that recognises their service and sacrifice.

Around 1,200 ADF personnel leave service and settle into civilian life in NSW each year. Those veterans will create a new direction for their lives and that of their families. Key for most veterans is how to participate in economic life by finding new employment.

For many, this period of transition is critical. Finding the right job or training is crucial for a rewarding civilian life. It also makes good business sense for organisations to access the skills and experience of well-trained veterans. As well as technical skills gained in service – whether logistics, engineering and mechanical, navigation, aviation or defensive driving – veterans gain many highly desirable business skills. These can include people management, communication, problem solving, strategic and operational planning, and project management.

Veterans are often accompanied on the pathway to participation by partners, spouses and families. Just as their support during service was important for veterans, they too may benefit from support as they find new work and new purpose in a changed environment.

Highlights

— Targets continue to be exceeded. From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, 306 veterans were employed in new roles in the NSW Public Sector, exceeding the annual target of 250 new placements. 1,400 veterans have been employed in new roles since November 2018 (against a target of 1,000). During the 1 October 2021 to 31 Mar 2022 reporting period, 2,987 job applications were submitted by veterans, with a success rate of 5.9 per cent. The success rate remains slightly higher than the NSW general population application success rate of 5.0 per cent. Six monthly reports are delivered and available online.

- Transition support – ADF Member and Family Transition Seminars are an important way for NSW Government to connect with ADF members transitioning to civilian life. Face-to-face seminars and virtual seminars have given the Veterans Employment Program (VEP) a broad reach to transitioning members. Over August and September 2022 the VEP team attended seminars in Sydney, Wagga Wagga and Shoalhaven, speaking to a total of 260 veterans and their spouse/partner. Virtual seminars were held in 2021 during COVID-19 and continue to be held to support veterans unable to attend face-to-face seminars.
- The Ranks to Recognition (R2R) program assists veterans to transition into the civilian workforce. The program includes customised career advice, career counselling, skills assessment, recognition of prior learning, and training gap analysis. The program has now been extended to veterans' spouses and recognised partners. In the six-month reporting period (21 October 2021 – 22 March 2022) 137 enrolled in R2R comprising 91 veterans and 46 partners.
- VEP facilitated NSW Veterans Employment Roundtables at the Anzac Memorial on 2 December 2021 and 2 November 2022. They were attended by NSW Public and Private Sector representatives, Defence Member and Families Organisation (formerly Defence Community Organisation), Department of Veterans' Affairs and many ESOs. The 2022 focus was on veterans in construction to support pathways and support for veterans into the industry with representatives from the Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and the Civil Contractors Federation in attendance.



Top left: VEP Employment Workshop, September 2022.

Top right: ADF Member and Family Transition Seminar, Wagga Wagga, 2022.

Below: NSW Veterans Employment Roundtable, December 2021. Photos by NSW Government



THEME 2

Education and Employment

Status of Actions

No.	Action	Lead	Status
Access to education			
2.1	Ranks to Recognition	TAFE	<p>From January 2021 to 31 October 2022, 487 veterans were referred to the Ranks to Recognition program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 412 veterans were enrolled in TAFE to achieve a formal qualification – 191 veterans were enrolled in Certificate IV qualifications – 89 veterans were enrolled in Diploma level qualifications – 95 veterans' spouses enrolled in TAFE to achieve a formal qualification
2.2	Veterans Education Scholarship Program	OVA/ TAFE	<p>The Veterans Education Scholarship Program was replaced by the Veteran Skills program (from 1 July 2021). It provides veterans and their recognised spouse/partner access to fee-free or highly subsidised training under the NSW Job Trainer program and also supports applicants if they only require a part qualification to be 'job ready' to pursue a civilian career path. Courses are offered at approximately 360 Registered Training Organisations throughout NSW.</p>
2.3	Skilling for Recovery (Veteran Skills program launched 1 July 2021)	DOE	<p>From 1 July 2021 – 31 October 2022, 1,188 veterans or partners enrolled in training programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 360 veterans in part qualifications; 217 completed – 36 veterans' partners in part qualifications; 26 completed – 387 veterans in full qualifications; 23 completed – 134 veterans' partners in full qualifications; 5 completed
2.4	Tertiary Entry	OVA	<p>Research was undertaken to map out university services and programs which assist veterans to access and succeed in tertiary education. OVA engaged with universities offering extensive support to veteran students and developed material to promote these opportunities.</p>
Pathways to employment			
2.5	Veterans Employment Program	OVA	<p>From November 2018, 1,400 veterans have been employed in new roles in the NSW Public Sector against the four-year target of 1,000, correct as at 31 March 2022, with six months to go.</p>
2.6	Veterans Teaching STEM including Trades Training	DOE/TAFE	<p>NSW DOE has established a new pathway - The Mid-Career Transition to Teaching - open to a range of industry and trades people including veterans.</p> <p>NSW DOE attended in-person Defence transition seminars and developed materials with relevant information for veterans.</p> <p>From July 2021 TAFE NSW commenced promotion of the transition pathway, TEACH AT TAFE, for veterans to become teachers.</p> <p>In 2022 TAFE NSW attended eight virtual and six face-to-face Defence transition seminars using the developed materials to promote TEACH AT TAFE, Ranks to Recognition and gain expressions of interest.</p> <p>From July 2022 TAFE NSW developed and launched a quarterly employment pathways information newsletter for veterans. TAFE NSW has developed web resources promoting Ranks to Recognition and opportunities to express interest in becoming a teacher.</p>

No.	Action	Lead	Status
2.7	Preferred Employers: Local Government Employment Initiative	OLG/OVA	Seven Councils have established programs as at 31 October 2022: — Lake Macquarie, City of Newcastle, Campbelltown, and Blacktown City Councils, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, Tweed, and Uralla Shire Councils
2.8	Preferred Employers: Corporate Partnerships	OVA	Roundtables have been held in 2021 and 2022, chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary and Minister, bringing together ADF, Corporate, ESO & Private Sector organisations to collaborate on veteran employment annually. The 2022 Roundtable focused on veterans employed in the construction industry. Additionally, a briefing with Small Medium Enterprise Defence Industries regarding the benefits of hiring veterans took place during INDO PACIFIC 2022.
2.9	Veteran Workshops	OVA	Two workshops were conducted in 2021, one at the Anzac Memorial and one online to support both metro and regional veterans. Two workshops were conducted at the Anzac Memorial in 2022, with a third planned for November 2022.
2.10	Veterans Employment and Business Initiatives	TSY	Investment has developed an Industry Partnerships Program (IPP) that will include veteran participation and this will be launched in the 2022–2023 financial year.
2.11	Return to Work Needs	DCJ	In consultation with OVA, Women NSW integrated resources for women veterans and spouses/partners of ADF members in the Return to Work Toolkit. Women NSW also consulted with OVA on further opportunities for the program to support women veterans and ADF spouses/partners who are entering or re-entering the workforce.
Support for families and spouses			
3.1	Veterans' Spouses and Partners	TAFE/OVA	Veterans and their partners who enrol at TAFE NSW via the Ranks to Recognition program have access to TAFE NSW support services, including counselling, disability services and study support to complete their qualification, equipping them with the skills they need to gain employment.

Community and Volunteering

Outcome

Veterans are an active and valued part of our community.

Life in service is rich in connections, activity and meaning. Service places a focus on the team, creating a culture of mutual support and connection. For some, transitioning to civilian life can create a sense of disconnection and a need for additional meaning. For others, moving from a time of intense structured activity to an absence of structure can also mean the loss of connection to sport and other fitness activities that help both body and mind. Yet even when veterans have experienced physical or psychological injuries, they have the capacity to lead active, purposeful and fulfilling lives. Connecting into what the local community can offer can be invaluable for veterans.

The concept of service and contribution is just as important for civilian communities. Volunteering is crucial for our society and for the economy. The NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020–2030 estimates that more than 2 million people in NSW volunteer their time to others. As well as benefiting the community, volunteering has personal benefits, as volunteers often experience reduced symptoms of depression and lower mortality, perceive their health to be better, and expand skills and networks.

A warm welcome into community is foundational for successful integration, and local government and ESOs play a key role in offering support. The NSW Government also plays a part, for example through the Service NSW information page, which assists veterans to understand available services and concessions.

Highlights

- Corrective Services NSW launched their pilot Mentoring/Buddy Support System in April 2022 at the VEP Veteran Champions Networking event, to assist veterans who are contemplating transitioning to a career with Corrective Services NSW. Corrective Services NSW have identified more than 50 former military members within its members who are willing and keen to support new ADF personnel entering the service. Once new ADF recruits have passed through their recruit training, they will be contacted and advised of staff at their centre, or in their region who are former military service personnel and willing to assist and support their transition into their new career.
- An innovative pilot program showcasing NSW Government services, benefits and concessions that are available to veterans was developed by OVA with Services NSW and the Trustee and Guardian. Over 100 veterans, family members, advocates and ESO members attended the four initial sessions. Two further sessions are in the planning stages and expected to be held in Newcastle before the end of 2022. Preliminary feedback indicates that the veteran community found the insights that were provided extremely useful and that they valued the opportunity to find out more about government services.
- With funding provided by the Office of Sport, Invictus Australia connected veterans and their families to sporting communities for ongoing participation. In 2021–2022 Invictus Australia enhanced its support in the Hunter region and piloted a veteran engagement model in Nowra with the establishment of a Veteran Engagement Specialist, supporting sport, volunteering and connectivity.



Top: Launch of Corrective Service NSW's Mentoring/Buddy Support System at the VEP Veteran Champions Networking event in April 2022. Photo by NSW Government

Below: With funding provided by the NSW Office of Sport, Invictus Australia connected veterans and their families to sporting communities such as Remount, which delivers horsemanship programs for current and former service men and women and their families. Photo by Invictus Australia

THEME 3

Community and Volunteering

Status of Actions

No.	Action	Lead	Status
Veterans in the community			
3.2	Expanding Volunteering Opportunities	OVA/SES	Meetings with SES have been held to progress volunteering opportunities, however natural disasters as well as COVID-19 have impacted implementation.
3.3	Expanding Volunteering Opportunities in Sport	OOS	A digital platform to support volunteering in sport and active recreation, in particular by veterans, is being progressed by the Office of Sport and Invictus Australia. Consultation with community sport organisations and the veteran community has informed its development.
3.4	NSW Carers Strategy	DCJ	Meetings with the Carers team in DCJ have been held to progress opportunities to highlight veterans needs and these opportunities will be developed in 2023–2024.
3.5	Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy	DCJ	The NSW Government's Seniors Strategy, <i>Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021–2031</i> specifically recognised that being a veteran is a factor that can lead to increased vulnerability to the many challenges that ageing can present.
3.6	NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022 Annual Action Plans	DCJ	Two specific actions were included in the NSW Women's Strategy Year Four Action Plan in Priority Area number 3 - Participation and empowerment. 1. Explore veterans' heritage through the diversity of their experiences. Work initially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and women veterans to co-design an approach that tells their stories and publicise them throughout 2021, The Year of Diverse Stories, on the NSW War Memorial Register, see action 1.4.1. 2. Hold an annual event at the Anzac Memorial during Women's Week to recognise the service of women veterans, and support networking and connection, see action 1.1.5.
3.7	Peer Mentoring	OVA/ Corrective Services	Corrective Services NSW launched their pilot Mentoring/Buddy Support System in April 2022 at the VEP Veteran Champions Networking event. A simple system to assist veterans who are contemplating transitioning to a career with Corrective Services NSW.
3.8	Veterans Forum	OVA	OVA developed an online forum for members of NSW ESOs focusing on the area of grant funding opportunities and best practice approaches, identified as an important governance development opportunity for ESOs.
Health and wellbeing			
3.9	Vetfit	OOS	With funding provided by the Office of Sport, Invictus Australia connected veterans and their families to sporting communities for ongoing participation. In 2021–2022, Invictus Australia enhanced its support in the Hunter region and piloted a veteran engagement model in Nowra with the establishment of a Veteran Engagement Specialist (VES). This VES worked with: — local sporting providers and veteran groups to connect veterans and their families with local sport organisations and clubs. — veterans with complex needs to help them become involved in local sporting communities for the benefit of their physical health and mental wellbeing.



Left: Pathways to NSW session delivered in September 2022. Photo by Service NSW



No.	Action	Lead	Status
3.10	Nowra Veteran Wellbeing Centre	OOS/ DCJ/ NSW Health/ OVA/ DOE/ TAFE	OVA supported the development of the business case for the Nowra Centre and made connections to NSW Government services. This work supported the provision of the Commonwealth grant to deliver a temporary facility and newly built wellbeing centre which will be opened officially in December 2022.
3.11	ESO Collaboration	OVA	Biannual formal meetings were held with key ESOs to discuss issues facing the veteran community as well as many informal meetings.
Access to information			
3.12	Veterans' Service NSW Information Page	Service NSW/ OVA	The Service NSW Veterans page was enhanced in December 2021 and continues to be updated when new content is available or necessary.
3.13	Pathway to NSW	Service NSW	Four pilot sessions were held in Newcastle, Taree, Ourimbah and Tea Gardens. Further sessions are being developed for delivery in the coming months.
3.14	Information through Seniors Card	DCJ	A range of veteran related information has been published in the Seniors Newsletter from April 2021 to November 2022. Topics included the announcement of the Veterans Strategy and Action Plan, ways to participate in key commemorations including Anzac Day and Remembrance Day, the promotion of exhibitions in the Anzac Memorial, as well as various benefits and concessions applicable to veterans and their families.

Support Initiatives

Outcome

Veterans with additional needs receive the support and services they require.

After leaving the ADF, most people transition into rewarding civilian lives where they continue to be valuable contributors to their communities. However, that transition may not always be straightforward; civilian life is different to military life in many ways, and as most people enter the military at a young age, the transition to civilian life as adults can be particularly difficult.

Providing the right support to veterans to navigate the transition successfully takes time and requires a flexible approach that reflects the diversity of veterans, their families, and their needs. Some veterans and their families also need support to deal with injuries or conditions that arise from their service, including challenges for mental, physical, and psychosocial health.

Navigating mainstream systems, including health and housing services, can be complex for veterans. While the NSW Government offers a wide range of services, including concessions and subsidies, it can be difficult for veterans and their families to identify the right services and understand which are tailored for the unique needs of veterans and their families.

Providing clarity about the support available to veterans, ensuring easy access to services, and making sure support is tailored to the needs of veterans will assist veterans to live fulfilling and active lives.

Highlights

— In March 2021 the OVA newsletter was launched. During the 2021–2022 period, 6 e-newsletters were sent to subscribers featuring stories and updates on veteran community programs, concessions and services for veterans, OVA grants, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, commemorative events, and heritage developments relating to war memorials in NSW. As well as keeping the NSW veteran community updated with key programs, the newsletter is an important channel for engaging with veterans, receiving positive feedback from recipients throughout the year.

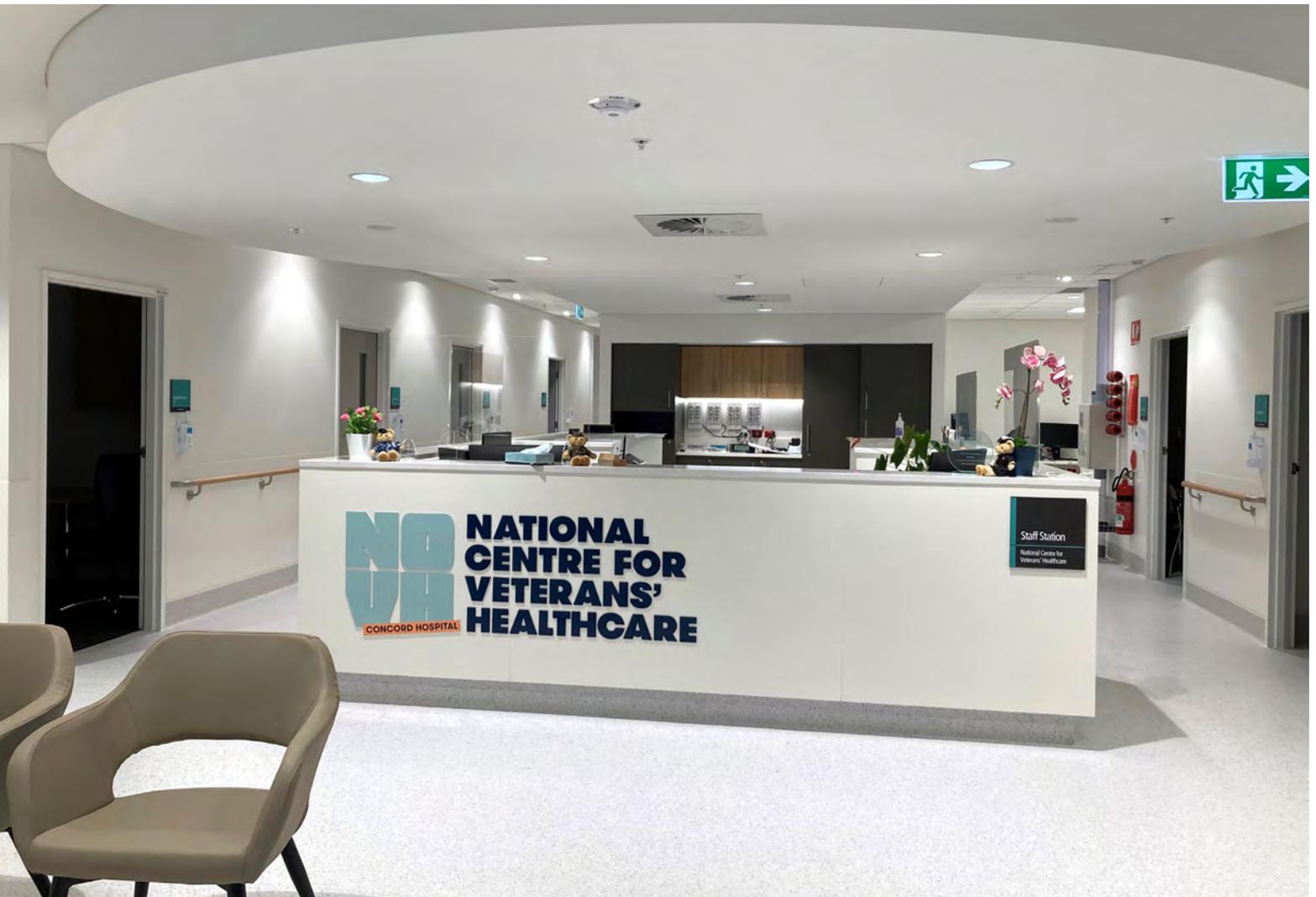
— In March 2022, a new, purpose-built premise for the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare (NCVH) was opened. These new facilities provide a permanent home from which the NCVH can continue to provide its innovative, integrated healthcare model to the Australian veteran community. Clinicians work closely with the patient and their family and carers in all aspects of their treatment planning and goal setting, and offer an extensive range of clinical services.

— The Defence Community Dogs program provides, at no cost, highly trained Assistance Dogs to both serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members, who need physical and emotional support for mood, depressive and anxiety disorders, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is described as a “win-win-win program” – rehoming or rescuing dogs, helping inmates to rehabilitate (whilst training the dogs under professional supervision), and helping veterans to rebuild – and often save – their lives.

The program was dealing with the impact of increased restrictions and lockdowns throughout 2021. The Correctional Centres which are the epicentre of the training were in extended lockdowns, impacting graduations and restricting the public area training program for months at a time. However, the team continued to find innovative ways to conduct training remotely and managed to conduct some graduations in 2021 and a larger number of dogs have been able to graduate with their veterans in 2022.



Top: The Defence Community Dogs program. Photo by Corrective Services NSW
Below: The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare (NCVH), opened in March 2022. Photo by NCVH



THEME 4

Support Initiatives

Status of Actions

No.	Action	Lead	Status
Concessions and supports			
4.1	Gold Opal Card	Transport for NSW	An online application process is available all year round.
4.2	Energy Social Programs	DPIE	The energy social programs and rebates to veterans are included in the OVA newsletters which are distributed three times per year. Information about this rebate was also included in the Seniors Newsletter in September 2021.
4.3	National Park Entry Fee Concession	DPIE (NPWS)	The National Park Entry Fee Concession to veterans is included in the OVA newsletters, distributed three times per year. Information about this concession was also included in the Seniors Newsletter in March 2022.
Housing and homelessness			
4.4	Rent Choice Veterans	DCJ	In 2021-2022, Rent Choice Veterans assisted 52 households. External factors have impacted uptake but DCJ is exploring ways to improve opportunities for clients to secure a tenancy and activate a subsidy.
4.5	Link2home Veterans and Ex-Service	DCJ	Supported 287 calls about housing in the 2020-2021 financial year and 323 calls in the 2021-2022 financial year.
Physical and mental health			
4.6	National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare (NCVH)	NSW Health	Ninety-one new veterans commenced as clients with NCVH in the 2021 calendar year with a further 67 commencing YTD in 2022 (January to August).
4.7	COPE Pilot Program, The Buttery	NSW Health/OVA	A pilot residential program to reduce the impact of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Substance Use Disorder for veterans was held at the Buttery Clinic in the Northern Rivers area. While uptake was impacted by COVID-19, six veterans attended and the evaluation found that all participants showed an improvement in their reported wellbeing from entry to program exit.
4.8	Get Healthy	NSW Health	The Get Healthy program was included in the OVA newsletters, distributed three times per year.
4.9	Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services	NSW Health	Information about these services is included in the OVA newsletters which are distributed three times per year.
4.10	Towards Zero Suicides Initiatives	NSW Health	NSW Health is working to reduce the suicide rate by 20 per cent by 2023.
4.11	Data Monitoring to Support Suicide Prevention	DCJ	The NSW Suicide Monitoring System commenced in October 2020. From March 2021, data on ADF suicides and suspected suicides has been provided monthly to NSW Health. Analysis and reporting is published on the NSW Health website. An interagency working group meets regularly to discuss data collection.

No.	Action	Lead	Status
4.12	Working with DVA and AIHW	DCJ	OVA participates in national meetings with DVA and the AIHW, as well as the other States and Territories. Data from the AIHW is used to progress initiatives to assist veterans across all jurisdictions.
4.13	Assistance Dogs for Veterans	Corrective Services NSW/ Defence Community Dogs	The program was affected by COVID-19 throughout 2021 due to Correctional Centre closures and travel restrictions, however seven dogs were matched with veterans in the 2021-2022 financial year. Fourteen assistance dogs were graduated and provided to veterans in the 12 months to October 2022.
Other supports and services			
4.14	Veterans Research Partnership	OVA	The planned research and funding application was delayed due to impacts of COVID-19. A proposal has been developed and will be considered in the 2023-2024 Action Plan.
4.15	You're Welcome	DOE	Work has commenced on the development of a resource for teachers and school staff to raise awareness of the needs of Defence connected students. Despite delays due to COVID-19 and natural disasters in NSW, the Department of Education aims to deliver the resource before the end of 2022.
4.16	Legal Support for Veterans	Legal Aid NSW	Information on the legal support available for veterans is included in the OVA newsletters which are distributed three times per year.
4.17	Use of Crown Lands	DPIE	Information on available Crown Land resources is included in the OVA newsletters which are distributed three times per year.

Veteran services and concessions promoted in OVA newsletters



Concession Park Passes

Eligible veterans can apply for a NSW National Parks Concession Pass. This gives you free motor vehicle entry for a single vehicle into the 45 national parks that charge entry fees.

[Read more >](#)



Get Healthy

The NSW Get Healthy Service is a free, phone-based health coaching service to help NSW adults over 16 years of age set and achieve their own health goals with the support and guidance of an expert health coach.

[Read more >](#)



Using Crown Reserves

There are over 400 Crown Reserves listed in a new directory many of which are for public and recreation purposes. The directory has an interactive map and provides information on the facilities available and the activities undertaken on the reserve.

[Read more >](#)



Veterans' Advocacy Service

Legal Aid NSW can help veterans and their dependants with advice and representation. Legal Aid can also help lodge DVA claims and appeals to the Veterans' Review Board, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Federal Court.

[Read more >](#)



Energy Social Programs

The NSW Social Code provides rebates and the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme to help vulnerable customers, including eligible veterans, pay their energy bills.

[Read more >](#)



Alcohol and Drug Information Service

If you are having issues with alcohol or other drugs, are concerned about someone else's alcohol or other drug use, or just have general questions about alcohol or other drugs, you can call ADiS any time of the day or week for support, information, counselling and referral to services in NSW. They have a 24-hour support line :1800 250 015. There's also an ADiS Web Chat service available 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[Read more >](#)

