



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday, 30 September 2020

APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM NATIONAL COMMISSIONER WELCOMED

The next step has been taken in the Federal Government's efforts to combat suicide in veterans and serving members of the Australian Defence Force with the appointment of the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel Darren Chester welcomed the announcement made by the Attorney-General Christian Porter today appointing Dr Bernadette Boss CSC to this important role.

"The health and wellbeing of our veterans and ADF personnel is at the heart of the National Commissioner legislation and is part of the Government's commitment to putting veterans and their families first," Mr Chester said.

"The appointment of an interim commissioner is a significant step forward as we work to ensure our personnel and veterans have the help they need, when and where they need it when it comes to their mental health.

"I congratulate Dr Boss on her appointment as the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention who will start working to identify and understand the factors and systemic issues that may contribute to suicide risk and provide recommendations to improve prevention efforts.

"Dr Boss started her career as a nurse, completing a Bachelor of Science in London and later studying law. She had a distinguished military career and has held inquests and hearings into complex deaths, including suicides.

"As a current Magistrate and Coroner in the Australian Capital Territory, Dr Boss has the skills and expertise to examine these tragic instances of ADF and veteran suicides to understand practical actions to reduce suicide risk."

This announcement builds on the Government's ongoing commitment to support the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families, including funding free mental health care for any mental health condition, improvements to transition and employment support, and assistance to those veterans particularly at risk.

"The Government is providing psychiatric assistance dogs for veterans with PTSD as a supplement to clinical mental health treatment – a program that veterans and their family members are telling me is changing their lives and saving lives," Mr Chester said.

"We continue to roll out a national program of more than 45 Open Arms Peer Workers who connect with veterans and family members who may be struggling with their mental health, bringing a lived experience of mental health issues and, importantly, of recovery.

“We have also invested in the Coordinated Client Support program to identify veterans at risk before they transition out of service and provide them with a single point of contact as well as delivering increased employment support for ADF members looking for career development and job placement support as they set up for civilian life.

“In June, the Government extended the Provisional Access to Medical Treatment program, which delivers medical treatment to veterans for the top 20 most commonly accepted conditions while their claim is being considered, and the Wellbeing and Support Program, which provides intensive face-to-face case management services for highly vulnerable veterans who are transitioning or who have complex needs.”

While legislation is currently before the Parliament to establish the role permanently, the National Commissioner will begin important work to strengthen our efforts toward suicide prevention, including conducting an independent review of past Defence and veteran suicides.

Following the passage of legislation, the National Commissioner will have enduring power, scope and resources to inquire into deaths by suicide, and will support future wellbeing and suicide prevention efforts, by identifying the need for any system-wide reforms, or new approaches to support ADF members and veterans.

“The National Commissioner will make recommendations to the Government about actions and strategies to prevent future suicides, and will report publicly on their findings to Parliament each year,” Mr Chester said.

“The Government will be required to report on the progress of these recommendations, and the National Commissioner will have an ongoing role in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations it makes.”

For more information on how the Australian Government is supporting veterans and their families, visit dva.gov.au.

Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au.

For further information on the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, visit www.nationalcommissionerdvosp.gov.au.

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