

FACTSHEET - EFFECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS ON CURRENT AND FORMER-SERVING ADF PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES

Purpose

This Factsheet explains how mental health concerns can affect veterans and their families and what help is available.

What are the most common mental health concerns in current and former-serving ADF personnel?

The most common mental health concerns among current and former serving ADF members and their families can be grouped into these categories:

- Depression;
- Anxiety, including panic and social anxiety disorders;
- Trauma and stress-related conditions, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- Substance use and addiction issues, relating to alcohol or other drugs; and
- Physical symptoms that are associated with distress and impairment.

How can mental health concerns affect current and former-serving ADF personnel?

Mental health concerns can affect current and former serving ADF members in a range of different ways. Some of the most common include:

- becoming emotionally detached, or “numb”, to avoid feeling overwhelmed;
- withdrawing into work or other activities or spending increased time alone;
- trying to control many aspects of their life and becoming frustrated or angry if this is not achievable;
- exerting control over day-to-day activities or behaviours of family members, including increased vigilance regarding family members’ safety because of their own previous exposure to danger;
- being excessively aggressive or having angry outbursts over small issues;
- self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs; and
- thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

Sometimes it can take years for a current or former ADF member or family members to seek help for their mental health concerns. Unfortunately, delays in seeking help to address mental health issues can sometimes cause further problems in areas such as relationships, work or general wellbeing. Because of this, Open Arms recommends seeking help as soon as possible when difficulties arise. A good place to start is by calling Open Arms on 1800 011 046.

How can mental health concerns affect the families of current and former-serving ADF personnel?

A veterans' mental health concerns often do not just impact the veteran, but can also affect loved ones. Spouses, partners and children can all experience difficulties as a result of a current or former-serving ADF member's mental health concerns.

Partners might:

- feel unsupported and like their veterans do not connect with them enough, emotionally or physically;
- feel like they have to take on full responsibility for day-to-day family life; and
- take on the role of peacemaker if family life feels like one crisis after another.

Children might:

- feel confused and angry if a parent is physically and/or emotionally absent;
- blame themselves or feel not good enough if they are unable to meet their parents' expectations;
- struggle to become independent if a parent is overly controlling;
- care for their parent at the expense of some of their own needs; or
- feel like home is not a safe and caring place.

While support from family members can assist the recovery of a current or former-serving ADF member with mental health concerns, family members also need to ensure they take steps to care for themselves and their own mental health and wellbeing.

What help is available?

Open Arms offers individual, couple and family counselling, and group programs to help current and former serving ADF members and their families understand and address mental health concerns. Open Arms also offers the family-focussed services as well as group programs that might assist parents and families. See the [Open Arms Group Calendar](#) for details. Open Arms also provides referrals to specialised services for families and children where appropriate.

For access to mental health videos, self-help tools, mobile apps, and advice on how to seek professional help, visit DVA's [At Ease website](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au) at www.at-ease.dva.gov.au.

Your GP can provide treatment or refer you to a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker if needed.

Am I eligible for Open Arms?

To find out if you are eligible, or for more information about available services, please contact your nearest Open Arms centre on **1800 011 046*** or visit www.Openarms.gov.au

Disclaimer



1800 011 046

GPO Box 9998
Brisbane, QLD 4001

www.openarms.gov.au

The information contained in this Factsheet is general in nature and does not take into account individual circumstances. You should not make important decisions, such as those that affect your financial or lifestyle position on the basis of information contained in this Factsheet. Where you are required to lodge a written claim for a benefit, you must take full responsibility for your decisions prior to the written claim being determined. You should seek confirmation in writing of any oral advice you receive from DVA.

More Information

Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling Service

Phone: 1800 011 046 *

Email: OPENARMS.COORD@dva.gov.au

Open Arms Website: www.OpenArms.gov.au

At Ease Website: www.at-ease.dva.gov.au

DVA General Enquiries

Phone: 1800 555 254 *

Email: GeneralEnquiries@dva.gov.au

DVA Website: www.dva.gov.au

* Calls from pay phones and some mobile phones may incur additional charges.