



# Making a submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide



**DEFENCE & VETERANS  
LEGAL SERVICE**

*Free, independent legal support to participate in the  
Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*

*One way to share your story with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (Royal Commission) is by making a submission. A submission is a statement to the Royal Commission outlining your experiences and sharing information, ideas and recommendations for change.*

*This resource is intended as general guidance. It should not be relied on as legal advice and we recommend that you talk to a lawyer from our service about your situation.*

## Contact the Defence and Veterans Legal Service for legal help

If you have questions, are not sure, or are worried about making a submission, contact the Defence and Veterans Legal Service for independent, tailored legal advice.

We can discuss with you your options for sharing your experiences with the Defence and Veterans Royal Commission and how to do this safely.

We can also provide you with legal advice to inform your decisions and your engagement with the Royal Commission. Call us on 1800 33 1800 (free call) or contact us at our website: [www.defenceveteranslegalservice.org.au](http://www.defenceveteranslegalservice.org.au)



If you are deaf, hard of hearing and/or have a speech impairment, you can contact us using the National Relay Service: [nrschat.nrscall.gov.au/nrs/internetrelay](https://nrschat.nrscall.gov.au/nrs/internetrelay)



If you need an interpreter, you can call us and ask for an interpreter or call the free Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask for Defence and Veterans Legal Service on 1800 33 1800.

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## Who can make a submission?

The Royal Commission is inviting interested members of the public and institutions to make submissions.

You don't have to include your name and details when making your submission. It will still form part of the Royal Commission's work if you do an anonymous submission, but it means the Royal Commission will not be able to contact you to discuss or check details in your submission.

## What can submissions be about?

The terms of reference for the Royal Commission set out the issues that it is inquiring into. The terms of reference are at Annexure 1 to this booklet. They talk about:

- a. systemic issues and any common themes among defence and veteran deaths by suicide;
- b. analysis of the contributing risk factors;
- c. the impact of culture within the ADF, Department of Defence and Department of Veterans Affairs;
- d. the role of non-government organisations;
- e. protective and rehabilitative factors;
- f. the current availability and effectiveness of support services;
- g. issues to do with engagement with government departments;
- h. the legislative and policy frameworks;
- i. systemic risk factors contributing to defence and veteran death by suicide, including the following:
  - defence members' and veterans' social or family contexts;
  - housing or employment issues for defence members and veterans;
  - defence members' and veterans' economic and financial circumstances;
- j. any other matter related to these or that the commissioner believes is relevant.

## How do I make a submission?

The Royal Commission is using one form for all submissions.

Not all questions will be relevant to every person making a submission and you only need to complete those that are relevant to you. You can make a separate submission for issues relating to different people or combine them into one submission.

The submission form includes questions about:

- you (your name and contact details)
- your submission (What you are sharing? Is it about your own experiences or someone else's?)
- which of the Royal Commission's terms of reference your submission is about.

The form also asks you to provide the Royal Commission with other comments, including your ideas about change and what you would like the Royal Commission to recommend.

You can make your submission:

1. Online: [submissions.defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/general/submissions](https://submissions.defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/general/submissions)
2. Using a paper form:

You can download a printable version [PDF] of the submission form, print it out, fill it in, and mail it to: GPO Box 3273, Sydney NSW 2001. If you are unable to print the form you can ring the Royal Commission on 1800 329 095 (9am to 7pm AEST Monday to Friday) and ask for a form to be posted to you.

The Royal Commission will accept submissions up until 13 October 2023.

## How will the Royal Commission use my submission?

The information you give to the Royal Commission will help the commissioners with their inquiry and will be used to inform their reports and recommendations.

The Royal Commission may contact some people who make submissions. The Royal Commission will not contact everyone who makes a submission, but will ensure that all submissions are recorded, reviewed and used to inform its work.

The Royal Commission cannot resolve individual matters. It cannot fix or award compensation, or make orders requiring a party to a dispute to take or not take any action.

## How public will my submission be?

The Royal Commission may publish some of the submissions it receives unless you request that it not be made public, or the Royal Commission considers it should not be made public.

You can choose for your submission to be:

1. made public under your name
2. made public anonymously or
3. not made public at all.

Even if you request your submission be made public, the Royal Commission may not publish it in its entirety.

The Royal Commission may also redact/black out information in your submission, including where it is not relevant to the terms of reference, where the matters are subject to a non-publication order, for fairness, or where there are privacy concerns.

The information you provide may be published by the Royal Commission during its proceedings or in its reports without revealing the identity of the person or entity who supplied the information.

# What will happen to my submission after the Royal Commission is over?

At the conclusion of the Royal Commission, all its records, including submissions, will become subject to requests under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act). Royal commissions are not subject to the FOI Act while they are underway.

**Disclaimer:** This information is intended as a general guide. It should not be relied on as legal advice and we recommend that you talk to a lawyer from our service about your situation.

## Guide to drafting your submission

### *Step 1: Introduction*

- Use the introduction to set the scene.
- Identify if the submission will be about your own experience or the experience of someone else.
- Describe, in a sentence or two, what your submission will be about.

### *Step 2: Think about structure*

There are many ways you can structure your submission. You can:

1. Structure your submission chronologically.
2. Structure your submission by the terms of reference. These can be found at Annexure 1 to this booklet or on page 8 of the Royal Commission's submission form.

Think about what you want to share. If you want to share information about something that happened over a long period of time, structuring your submission chronologically will help your story to come across clearly.

If you want to talk about one or two specific issues, rather than a series of events, structuring the submission by theme could be more appropriate.

## Option 1:

If you would like to structure your submission chronologically or by headings:

1. Think about the series of events that make up your story.
2. Write out the key periods. These will form your headings. Use these headings to break up different time periods and signpost to the reader what they will read about in that section. For example:
  - a. "Joining the defence force"
  - b. "First deployment: Iraq"
  - c. "Divorce"
3. You can include dates in the headings so that the reader can clearly see the relevant period. For example, "Divorce – 2006".
4. Under each heading, start to write about what happened in that period. Try to keep the order of the events chronological.
5. State the facts as you recall them.
6. Try to keep to one idea or issue per paragraph.
7. Use paragraph and page numbers.
8. If you feel that sections are becoming too long, you can use subheadings. For example: if you were writing about a divorce and the lead up to it, you could use the subheadings:
  - a. "Marriage counselling – March to September 2005"
  - b. "Separation – October 2005"
  - c. "Custody battle – 2006-2007"
9. Once you have finished the chronology of events, think about if there are any messages you would like to share.
10. Create a separate heading. For example, "My message".
11. Write any specific thoughts or feelings about what happened that you would like the Royal Commission to be aware of and consider when making its recommendations to the Australian Government.

## Option 2:

Read through the terms of reference and choose which topic/s you want to address in your submission.

Put headings for each topic and write your submission underneath following steps 5-11 set out in Option 1.

### *Step 3: Write your recommendations*

Think about how things could be improved. Consider:

- What could have happened differently for you?
- Is there a person or an organisation that should have acted differently?
- Should there have been someone to oversee what happened?
- Should there have been someone independent to complain to?
- What should change in the future?
- Could a new law or policy, or more funding, fix the problem?

Write down your ideas under the heading “Recommendations”.

## Do you have more questions about making a submission?

**Call us on 1800 33 1800 for free legal advice.**

The Defence and Veterans Legal Service is independent and separate from the Royal Commission, the Department of Defence, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Any conversation between yourself and a lawyer will be confidential and protected by legal privilege.



## Annexure 1:

# Terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

- a. systemic issues and any common themes among defence and veteran deaths by suicide, or defence members and veterans who have other lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors (including attempted or contemplated suicide, feelings of suicide or poor mental health outcomes);
- b. a systemic analysis of the contributing risk factors relevant to defence and veteran death by suicide, including the possible contribution of pre-service, service (including training and deployments), transition, separation and post-service issues, such as the following:
  - i. the manner or time in which the defence member or veteran was recruited to the [the Australian Defence Force (the ADF)];
  - ii. the relevance, if any, of the particular branch, service or posting history, or the rank of the defence member or veteran;
  - iii. the manner or time in which the defence member or veteran transitioned from the ADF or transitioned between service categories;
  - iv. the availability, accessibility, timeliness and quality of health, wellbeing and support services (including mental health support services) to the defence member or veteran, and the effectiveness of such services;
  - v. the manner and extent to which information about the defence member or veteran is held by and shared within and between different government entities;
  - vi. the reporting and recording of information, relevant to the mental and physical health of defence members and veterans, at enlistment and during and after service;
- c. the impact of culture within the ADF, the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs on defence members' and veterans' physical and mental wellbeing;
- d. the role of non-government organisations, including ex-service organisations, in providing relevant services and support for defence members, veterans, their families and others;
- e. protective and rehabilitative factors for defence members and veterans who have lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors;
- f. any systemic issues in the current availability and effectiveness of support services for, and in the engagement with, families and others:
  - i. affected by a defence and veteran death by suicide; or
  - ii. who have supported a defence member or veteran with lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors;

- g. any systemic issues in the nature of defence members' and veterans' engagement with the Department of Defence, the Department of Veterans Affairs or other Commonwealth, State or Territory government entities (including those acting on behalf of those entities) about support services, claims or entitlements relevant to defence and veteran deaths by suicide or relevant to defence members and veterans who have other lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors, including any systemic issues in engaging with multiple government entities;
- h. the legislative and policy frameworks, administered by the Department of Defence, the Department of Veterans Affairs and other Commonwealth, State or Territory government entities, relating to the support services, claims and entitlements referred to in paragraph (g);
- i. any systemic risk factors contributing to defence and veteran death by suicide, including the following:
  - i. defence members' and veterans' social or family contexts;
  - ii. housing or employment issues for defence members and veterans;
  - iii. defence members' and veterans' economic and financial circumstances;
- j. any matter reasonably incidental to a matter referred to in paragraphs (a) to (i) or that [the Commissioners] believe is reasonably relevant to [their] inquiry.



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