



**DEFENCE & VETERANS
LEGAL SERVICE**

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

Have you been called to be a witness at a public hearing?

This factsheet explains what will happen and your rights when you are called to be a witness at a public hearing for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (the Royal Commission).

What is a public hearing?

A public hearing is a formal hearing of the Royal Commission. It is open to the public, recorded and live streamed on the Royal Commission's website.

The Commissioners hear evidence from witnesses and can ask questions. A witness is a person who will speak about their experience at a public hearing.

What does it mean to be a witness?

The Solicitors and Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission select witnesses. This may happen after you have made a submission to the Royal Commission or had a private session.

You might be asked to give a witness statement. This is a formal document about your experiences that sets out the evidence you will give to the Royal Commission.

At the start of giving your evidence at the hearing, you will be asked to make an oath or take an affirmation to state you are telling the truth.

You may be asked questions by Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission and/or by the Commissioners.

You can ask for a lawyer to assist you at the hearing.

Can I get help with my witness statement?

Yes. If you are asked to be a witness, you should get legal advice. The Defence and Veterans Legal Service can provide you with free, independent legal support.

We are independent of the Royal Commission, the Department of Defence, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

If you are asked to be a witness, you can have your own lawyer represent you. They can speak to the Royal Commission on your behalf and support you to prepare your witness statement.

Other support

The Royal Commission will support you to give evidence. They will set up any supports you need to be a witness.

If you want a support person, they can attend with you. You can also ask for counselling support before, during and after you give evidence.

Receiving a witness summons

Before you attend a public hearing as a witness, the Royal Commission will give you a formal document called a 'summons'. This gives you legal protections when you share your experiences.

Who is at the public hearing?

People at the public hearing can include:

- The public;
- Commissioners;
- Solicitors and Counsel working for the Royal Commission;
- Other Royal Commission staff, such as IT and counselling staff;
- Other witnesses; and
- The media.

What can the media report?

The Royal Commission can make orders about how information is, or is not, reported by the media. This can include keeping the identity of a witness or certain information confidential.

If there are no orders made, then the media can report any information shared during a public hearing.

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

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.