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## JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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THE HON DAN TEHAN MP  
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL  
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR CYBER SECURITY  
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE CENTENARY OF ANZAC  
and

THE HON. SUSSAN LEY MP  
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGED CARE

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30 November 2016

### **Preliminary results from study into veterans' suicide**

The Government today released the most statistically robust data ever compiled into the prevalence of suicide among current and former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) study *Estimation of incidence of suicide in ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel* used data from the Defence Department's Personnel Management Key System, which contains information on all people who serve or have served in the ADF from 1 January 2001, and the National Death Index (NDI). The NDI is a Commonwealth database that contains records of deaths registered in Australia since 1980. Data comes from Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages in each jurisdiction, the National Coronial Information System and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

To protect the integrity of the data, the study only included deaths that were officially recorded as a suicide by the Registrars of Births, Death and Marriages in each state and territory and the National Coronial Information System, compiled by the ABS. Certified cause of death data were available up to and including 31 December 2014. This study is ongoing and the Government will update the results as new data becomes available.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Dan Tehan said the study was an important development to further understand suicide in the veteran community.

"One suicide is one too many and the Government is committed to addressing suicide in our community," Mr Tehan said.

"The figures released today are the first accurate, robust data ever produced on suicide among the serving, reserve and ex-serving populations.

"This is the start of an ongoing, long-term project that will help us better understand the extent of the issue and inform our efforts to ensure people who need help get help."

The AIHW study found that between 2001 and 2014:

- there were 292 deaths by suicide among people with at least one day of ADF service since 2001. Of

these:

- 84 occurred in the serving full-time population
  - 66 occurred in the reserve population
  - 142 occurred in the ex-serving population
  - 272 were men and 20 were women
  - 66 were people aged 18–24
  - 58 were people aged 25–29
  - 46 were people aged 30–34
  - 122 were people aged 35 and over
- after adjusting for age, when compared with all Australian men, the suicide rate was:
    - 53% lower for men serving full-time
    - 46% lower for men in the reserve
    - 13% higher for ex-serving men
  - there were 23 deaths among ex-serving men aged 18–24, which is a suicide rate almost twice that of Australian men of the same age
  - the low number of female suicide deaths in the study did not allow for valid comparisons with the general population.

Because the Personnel Management Key System only began operation in 2001, there was no data on ADF personnel who served or separated before 1 January 2001.

Mr Tehan said the AIHW data would provide valuable insights for suicide prevention projects already underway.

"DVA spends about \$187 million each year providing mental health support to veterans and their families and the Government has announced an additional \$192 million over the next four years to tackle mental health challenges across our community," Mr Tehan said.

"From 1 July this year, the Government made mental health treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and alcohol and substance misuse free for anyone who has served one day in the ADF. This treatment is demand driven and fully funded, so if someone needs treatment, it is available — it is not limited by budget.

"In August, we announced the National Mental Health Commission would review the suicide and self-harm prevention services provided by Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

"A Suicide Prevention Trial Site with a focus on veterans' mental health is being rolled out in Townsville — home to a large ADF and veteran community. This will be one of 12 innovative, front-line trial sites in our fight against suicide which will improve our understanding of the challenges and help develop best-practice services that can be applied nationwide.

"Minister Ley and I will be holding a roundtable with local stakeholders in Townsville next week to discuss this issue and hear ideas that will help shape the new landmark suicide prevention trial in the region. Consultation and collaboration will be critical to the success of this trial.

"We are providing a \$6 million investment in Phoenix Australia to improve our understanding of mental health challenges and develop better treatment for our veterans and the wider community.

"We are providing \$3.1 million to extend the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, which provides free and confidential, nationwide counselling and support for war and service-related mental health conditions, as well as \$4 million to ex-service organisations to promote social inclusion and peer-to-peer support for younger veterans.

"We are continuing suicide prevention efforts in the veteran community by running the Operation Life suicide prevention and awareness workshops and a pilot program to support a more targeted approach to suicide prevention.

"If anyone is worried about how they are coping or feeling, then seek help early. If you know someone and are worried about them, speak up and ask for help. The Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service is a specialised, free and confidential Australia-wide support service and operates 24 hours a day on 1800 011 046."

Minister for Health Sussan Ley said the data in the AIHW report was vital to being able to provide better targeted, accessible and effective mental health services for our veterans.

"Mental health, and more specifically the mental health of our veterans, is a top priority of the Turnbull Government and we are tackling it on a range of fronts, through our ongoing mental health reform package," Minister Ley said.

"The Coalition is committed to strengthening mental health care and suicide prevention across Australia, with its pledge of \$192 million over the next four years on new mental health care programmes.

"The Government's nationwide network of localised primary health care organisations – Primary Health Networks – will play a key role in planning and commissioning mental health services tailored to local communities' needs."

Detailed findings by demographic and service specific characteristics and more complete population-level comparisons are expected by mid-2017.

For free mental health treatment, veterans should call the Department of Veterans' Affairs on 133 254 or, for regional callers 1800 555 254, or email [nlhc@dva.gov.au](mailto:nlhc@dva.gov.au). For more information, they can visit [www.dva.gov.au/nlhc](http://www.dva.gov.au/nlhc).

**Note to editors:**

Reporting of suicides has potential to cause distress and care should be taken in the format and presentation of these research findings – refer to <http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media> for guidance.

Please include the contact details for the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service in any reporting about this study. VVCS provides crisis support and counselling 24/7 on 1800 011 046.

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*Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) can be reached 24 hours a day across Australia for crisis support and free and confidential counselling. Phone 1800 011 046 (international: +61 8 8241 45 46). VVCS is a service founded by Vietnam veterans.*

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