

FAMILY AND FRIENDS



PUT YOUR MIND



Our mental health is as important to our wellbeing as our physical health. We can have good or poor mental health and everything in between, often depending on what's happening in our lives and how we're reacting to it.

What is a mental health problem?

Growing older, career changes, moving interstate, deployment, leaving the defence forces, divorce, grief and loss can all affect our mental health and wellbeing. It's normal to react to such events in our lives, but sometimes our reactions could be signs of a mental health problem, particularly if they persist. Mental health problems can range from mild to severe. We can do something about these ourselves, and at other times we may need to seek professional help.

Who experiences mental health problems?

About one in five Australians experience a mental health problem at least once in their lives – no matter what age, culture, educational or income level. And it's no different for the veteran and defence force communities. If not directly, someone you know, such as a family member, friend or colleague is likely to be affected.

What is a mental health disorder?

'Mental health disorders' refers to a number of different types of conditions that are usually associated with significant distress and affect our ability to cope with day-to-day life. The most common mental health disorders are anxiety, depression and alcohol misuse. People often experience more than one of these conditions at the same time.

Mental health and the veteran and defence force communities

Mental health problems of veterans and Australian Defence Force members may relate to deployment, coming home from a war or peacekeeping zone, or returning to civilian life. The most common are anxiety, depression and substance use related problems.

What impacts on family and friends?

Some veterans and ADF members have significant problems with:

- sleep
- anger
- a sense of helplessness
- relationships
- self blame
- low self-esteem

One in five Australians will experience a mental health problem at some stage in their life.



- isolation
- disappointment
- over protection of family members

Any of these could affect their ability to cope with daily life.

Helping someone with a mental health problem

As a friend or family member you play an important role, and this can sometimes be complex and demanding.

Your partner, family member or friend may find it hard to admit they need help. Taking the first step to getting help can be difficult. You can encourage them to seek help, and comment on small steps or positive changes. If they are already receiving treatment, with their permission, you could speak to their treating doctor, counsellor or health professional to get more information to help and support their recovery.

How may partners, other family members and friends feel?

As a partner, family member, or friend trying to support someone with a mental health problem, some of the following may seem familiar:

- Do you feel angry and frustrated that you can't make things better for them?
- Do you feel that it's your fault, even though you're not to blame?
- Do you feel embarrassed and worried about what others may think?
- Do you miss the relationship you once had, and wish you could turn back the clock?
- Do you feel scared that you can't cope or feel afraid for yourself and others?

Your mental health and wellbeing is important too

Looking after yourself may be the most important thing you do.

- Make sure you make time to look after yourself
- Take time out to see friends and relax
- Ensure that you are eating properly and getting enough sleep and regular exercise
- Make contact with other partners for support through organisations such as carers groups in your state or ex-service organisations
- Recognise the limits to what you can realistically achieve
- Develop a plan so that you can have some time out
- Find out about support services in your local area

Support for you

Speak to your local doctor or WVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service to get more information and support.

Where to go for more information or help

- Talk to your doctor or health professional
- Call WVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service about counselling and their group programs on **1800 011 046**
- For more information call DVA on **133 254**
- Visit **www.dva.gov.au**

More information is also available at:

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.carersaustralia.com.au

www.bluepages.anu.edu.au

www.therightmix.gov.au