



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION *NATIONAL OFFICE*

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

22 December 2015

MEDIA STATEMENT

‘ARE YOU OK’

NOT ENOUGH FOR VETERANS SUICIDAL OVER CHRISTMAS

Veterans suffering as a consequence of their service need far more than someone simply asking them how they are. The national ‘Are You OK’ (RUOK) campaign is a magnificent initiative to help identify someone at risk. But at Christmas time, unlike any other period across the year, the risk of depression and suicides are far greater, especially among Veterans who have been exposed to mental trauma or physical injury that isolates them.

The young men and women returning from Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor and the many other peacekeeping and peacemaking operations since the first Gulf War in 1990 need us to understand their unique problems, know that we are doing everything possible to help them, and see us implementing initiatives that will see them “survive the peace of Christmas” after suffering the horrors of conflict.

Figures collated by ex-serviceman and RSL welfare officer **John Enchong** shows 220 serving and non-serving military personnel ended their own lives between 1980 and mid-2015. An incredible 95 of them lost since 2011. Having served in Rwanda in 1994, John recently spoke at a special Remembrance Day service on the lawns of Parliament House.

“We want to raise awareness and get the message to both veterans and their families that help is out there,” he said. “Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and mental health problems do not have to be a death sentence.”

Problems do not need to be exacerbated by having to negotiate a complex bureaucracy while processing their claims. But that is often what happens when finding appropriate incident documentation and medical records from many years prior is difficult. The shift in claims from physical injuries to mental trauma under the SRCA and MRCA legislation has extended the time taken for staff to complete them within the Department of Veteran Affairs.

This is an area that the Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) has identified as of critical importance. DFWA is thus working with Government, the Department and other major ex-service organisations to institute appropriate

training in relevant aspects of legislation so as to close the gaps in any regulatory shortcomings that prevent immediate and appropriate support being provided to the men and women who have served their nation selflessly. DFWA asks only that they be cared for properly in their time of need.

Anyone needing help now or at any time of the year should immediately contact a 24-hour telephone counseling hotline, or you can request a welfare check to be conducted for a friend by contacting your local police station. Relevant contact numbers are as follows:

Veterans and Veterans Families Counseling Service (VVCS): 1800 011 046 or (International: +61 8 8241 4546). These numbers *provide 24 hours access for crisis support, and for free and confidential counseling.*

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

‘MensLine’ Australia: 1300 789 978

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Emergency Line: 000 or call 112 on a mobile phone

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36

<i>Contacts</i>		
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DFWA – Voice of the Defence Community