



VETERAN STAFF, PRISONERS AND OFFENDERS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2021▶25



Government
of South Australia

Department for
Correctional Services

Acknowledgment of Country

The State Government would like to preface this report with an Acknowledgement of Country.

The State Government acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today.

The State Government would also like to pay respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal people from other areas of South Australia and Australia who have contributed to the development of the Report and who will be involved in, or impacted by, the ongoing delivery of its recommendations.

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Acronyms

AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ADF	Australian Defence Force
DCS	Department for Correctional Services
DVA	Department of Veteran's Affairs
PSU	Program Services Unit
SEM	Strategic Executive Meetings
VSA	Veteran Support Agencies

Purpose

The Department for Correctional Services' (DCS / the Department) Veteran Staff, Prisoners and Offenders Strategy and Action Plan (the DCS Veteran Strategy) establishes a whole-of-Department approach for recognising and addressing the needs of veteran prisoners and offenders in South Australia, as well as recognising the lived experience and contribution of our veteran staff.

Adjacent: Paul Tyson, RSL Advocate, Plympton Veteran Centre



Background

DCS is responsible for the safe and humane management of prisoners and offenders in the South Australian criminal justice system. Within this group, there is a small cohort of veterans who are in prison or serving a sentence in the community who require specific support.

Staff as Veterans

At DCS, we believe that our staff should represent the diverse communities that it serves. Given the operational nature of the Department, DCS attracts staff with experience in other operational roles, including those with military experience. The Department is proud to employ ex-service personnel across our nine prisons and 16 Community Correctional Centres.

Data collected from a limited DCS snapshot in 2018 indicates that approximately 14 per cent of DCS custodial staff had served in the ADF. At one site veterans made up approximately 29 per cent of staff members.

DCS acknowledges that employing veterans is a mutually beneficial relationship for both veterans and the Department. The broad range of skills, experience, leadership qualities and problem-solving skills that are generally attributed to this cohort of employees makes them valuable to any workplace¹, and are often committed and loyal employees². For veterans having a job is a very important component of overall health and mental wellbeing³. We recognise the need for DCS to further understand the needs of veterans in the workplace, as well as recognising their contributions.

This Strategy and Action Plan will be an important step towards achieving this.

Prisoners and Offenders as Veterans

Well-established research into the needs of veterans reveal a high degree of complexity within this population group. Moreover, there is a connection between military service and interactions with the criminal justice system⁴.

According to research, key issues veterans may experience include:

- Leaving the defence force, particularly if discharge was involuntary⁵;
- Loss of identity and connection to social networks⁶;
- Mental health conditions caused or exacerbated by military service, such as post-traumatic stress disorder⁷;
- Alcohol and other drug⁹ (AOD) abuse;
- Challenges obtaining housing or experiencing homelessness¹⁰, which is additionally challenging for sex offenders and domestic violence offenders;
- Difficulties obtaining and maintaining employment due to criminal history checks and obtaining referee reports from military service¹¹;
- Inadequate skills and preparation for life as a civilian¹²; and
- Higher rates of self-harm and suicide¹³.

Research found that a gap exists in veterans' access to supports and services. Often veterans struggle to access support due to lack of awareness and no clear process to access support¹⁴. This finding is supported by an internal audit conducted by DCS in 2017 (see page four) which showed a lack of connection to services for veterans.

While there is activity currently underway across DCS to support veteran prisoners and offenders (see page four), the DCS Veteran Strategy sets out an approach for recognising and addressing the needs of veterans across all prisons and community correction sites, that also utilises the lived experience of our staff.

Defining and Identifying Veterans

The Australian Government defines a veteran as anyone who has served a minimum of one day's continuous full-time service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF)¹⁵. This service includes those who were based in the ADF Reserves, but only if they served at least one day in a full-time operational role (as opposed to training and related exercises).



From left: Jackie Bray, former Deputy Chief Executive, DCS; Chris Tilley, Senior Advisor, Veteran Services, DCS; Ian Campbell, Ex-Military Rehabilitation Centre; Darian Shephard-Bayly, Executive Director, Offender Development, DCS.

1 'Why hire veterans', Commonwealth of Australia, (WebPage, 2020) <www.veteranemployment.gov.au/employers/why-hire-veterans>.

2 Michelle Duncan, 'Successful Strategies of Small Business Owners to Recruit Veterans' (2018), Walden University ScholarWorks, 27.

3 The Australian Productivity Commission, *A Better Way to Support Veterans- Overview and Recommendations*, (No.93 27 June 2019) 14.

4 Department for Correctional Services, 'DCS Custodial Military Veteran Analysis' (2018) 16.

5 Jacco Duel, Lauren Godier-McBard, Mary Beth MacLean, Matt Fossey, 'Challenging missions: Vulnerable veterans leaving the armed forces and promising avenues to support them in Carl Andrew Castro and Sanela Dursun (eds), *Military Veteran Reintegration: Approach, Management, and Assessment of Military Veterans Transitioning to Civilian Life*, (Academic Press, 2019) 109.

6 Ibid 109-111, and Verma, Priti and Imran, Shahriar Al, 'Reintegration of Ex-Military Personnel with Civil Life - A Social Issue and Big Challenge: An Empirical Study' (2020) 10(3) *International Journal of Engineering and Management Research* 93.

7 Kerr K, Romaniuk M, McLeay S, Khoo A, Dent MT, and Boshen M, 'Increased risk of attempted suicide in Australian veterans is associated with total and permanent incapacitation, unemployment and posttraumatic stress disorder severity' (2018) 52(6) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 553.

8 Verma, Priti and Imran, Shahriar Al, 'Reintegration of Ex-Military Personnel with Civil Life - A Social Issue and Big Challenge: An Empirical Study' (2020) 10(3) *International Journal of Engineering and Management Research* 94-95.

9 Katherine J. Hoggatt, Keren Lehavot, Marketa Krenek, Catherine Amanda Schweizer PhD, 'Prevalence of substance misuse among US veterans in the general population' (2017) 26(4) *The American Journal of Addictions* 357.

10 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Development of a veteran-centred model: a working paper.' Cat. no. PHE 224. Canberra (2018) 8-9.

11 Above n 4, 554-555 and above n 7, 94 and Kintzle, Sara, Keeling, Mary, Xintarianos, Elizabeth, Taylor-Diggs, Kamil, Munch, Chris, Hassan M. Anthony, Castro A. Carl, 'Exploring the Economic & Employment Challenges Facing US Veterans: A Qualitative Study of Volunteers of America Service Providers and Veteran Clients, (2015) *US School of Social Work* 13.

12 Kintzle, Sara, Keeling, Mary, Xintarianos, Elizabeth, Taylor-Diggs, Kamil, Munch, Chris, Hassan M. Anthony, Castro A. Carl, 'Exploring the Economic & Employment Challenges Facing US Veterans: A Qualitative Study of Volunteers of America Service Providers and Veteran Clients, (2015) *US School of Social Work* 6.

13 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Incidence of suicide in serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel: detailed analysis 2001-2015* (2018) vi; Kelli Canada, David Albright, 'Veterans in the Criminal Justice System and the Role of Social Work' (2014) *Journal of Forensic Social Work* 51.

14 Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *The Constant Battle: Suicide by Veterans*, (Commonwealth of Australia 2017) 138.

15 Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs (2020) www.dva.gov.au/health-and-treatment/veteran-healthcare-cards/veteran-card

Strategic Context

National

The Australian Government has established a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, as an independent body to inquire into and support the prevention of suicide among serving and ex-serving ADF members.

On 19 April 2021, the Federal Government announced a *Royal Commission into Veteran and Serving Defence Suicide*, which will examine the systemic issues, all aspects of service and experience of ADF members and veterans who may continue to be at risk of suicide.

State

Veterans needs in South Australia are managed predominately by Veterans SA and local VSAs, with oversight and guidance from the South Australian Veterans Advisory Council.

The South Australian Veterans Advisory Council's role is to provide advice to the South Australian government on issues impacting on and relevant to those who have served and their families in South Australia.

Veterans SA is an agency within Defence SA and works closely with the Veterans Advisory Council to provide advice to the Premier about matters relating to South Australia's veteran community.

Veterans SA promotes Australia's wartime history and significant national events such as Anzac Day. Veterans SA also:

- ▶ Promotes the wellbeing of all members of the veteran community in South Australia;
- ▶ Encourages co-operation across all ex-service organisations in South Australia;
- ▶ Links the veteran community to the highest levels of state government; and
- ▶ Monitors and provides advice about matters relating to recognition and commemoration of the service of veterans.

DCS

As outlined in the Strategic Plan, DCS' mission is to manage offenders in a safe, secure and humane environment and provide opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration. The DCS Veteran Strategy will contribute to the Department's priorities under the Strategic plan, in particular:

Strategy 1: Offender Management and Rehabilitation:

- ▶ Contribute to South Australia by reducing reoffending 10% by 2020; and
- ▶ Better target programs and partnerships to support the successful reintegration of offenders to the community.

The Reducing Reoffending 10% by 2020 Strategy (10by20) provides a framework to focus DCS' services.

The Veterans Strategy aligns to DCS' commitments in 10by20, in particular:

- ▶ Strategy 1: Successful return to community;
- ▶ Strategy 3: Prioritising target cohorts; and
- ▶ Strategy 6: Partnerships and collaboration.





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DCS and Veterans

Statistics

DCS manages up to 3,135 prisoners at any given time across nine prisons and 5,872 offenders across 16 Community Correctional Centres.

In 2016, DCS amended its prisoner admission forms to record veteran status at prisoner induction. Since DCS started recording veteran status, there have been 108 prisoner admissions who have identified as a veteran. This figure may be higher as some prisoners choose not to disclose their veteran status.

DCS currently has 15 identified veterans in the prison system. It is expected that there is a high degree of underreporting of veteran status due to a range of factors. In the prison context, veterans may be hesitant to identify as a veteran due to a perceived ability to assist in criminal or anti-social activities due to their unique skill set or the shame associated with their offending.

Data for those under the supervision of Community Corrections is not currently collected. However, it is estimated that there could be over 200 veterans on a community order at any given time¹⁶.

DCS' Veteran Support Program

Currently, support for veteran offenders or prisoners occurs on an ad hoc basis, driven by individual staff members across the Department. From 2017 to 2020, DCS convened a weekly peer support group for veterans at Mobilong Prison. DCS staff with lived experience ran the group and provided mentoring to the prisoners. The peer support group ran effectively at Mobilong Prison until disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions.

The group provided an opportunity for veterans to:

- ▶ Interact with others with a shared experience;
- ▶ Raise awareness of support organisations that can assist veterans while in prison and in the community;
- ▶ Process their feelings as a veteran transitioning to civilian life; and
- ▶ Address common feelings of shame and mental health as an incarcerated veteran.

Between five and eight veterans attended the group weekly and discussed a range of topics, including the need for support around family connection, careers, employment and training, housing and homelessness and mental health support.

DCS Internal Audit

In 2017, DCS undertook an audit of the numbers of veterans serving custodial sentences within South Australian prisons. The audit identified that:

- ▶ 30% of veterans felt that their military service had an impact on their offending;
- ▶ 65% had mental health issues due to their service;
- ▶ 12% were registered with DVA, 8.6% had obtained a white or gold card;
- ▶ 10% said their families were receiving support from VSAs; and
- ▶ 81 of the 93 inmates assessed as veterans indicated a need for some form of support from either VSAs or DVA.

Engaging with Stakeholders

DCS is currently represented on the following DVA Working Groups, at Senior Executive and officer level:

- ▶ Incarcerated Veterans and their Families Working Group.
- ▶ Veteran Incarceration Qualitative Research Working Group.
- ▶ Younger Veterans, Contemporary Needs Forum.

* Data as at 29 April 2021

Adjacent: Lea Gordon, Community and Peer Adviser, Open Arms

Building a Better System: DCS Veteran Strategy

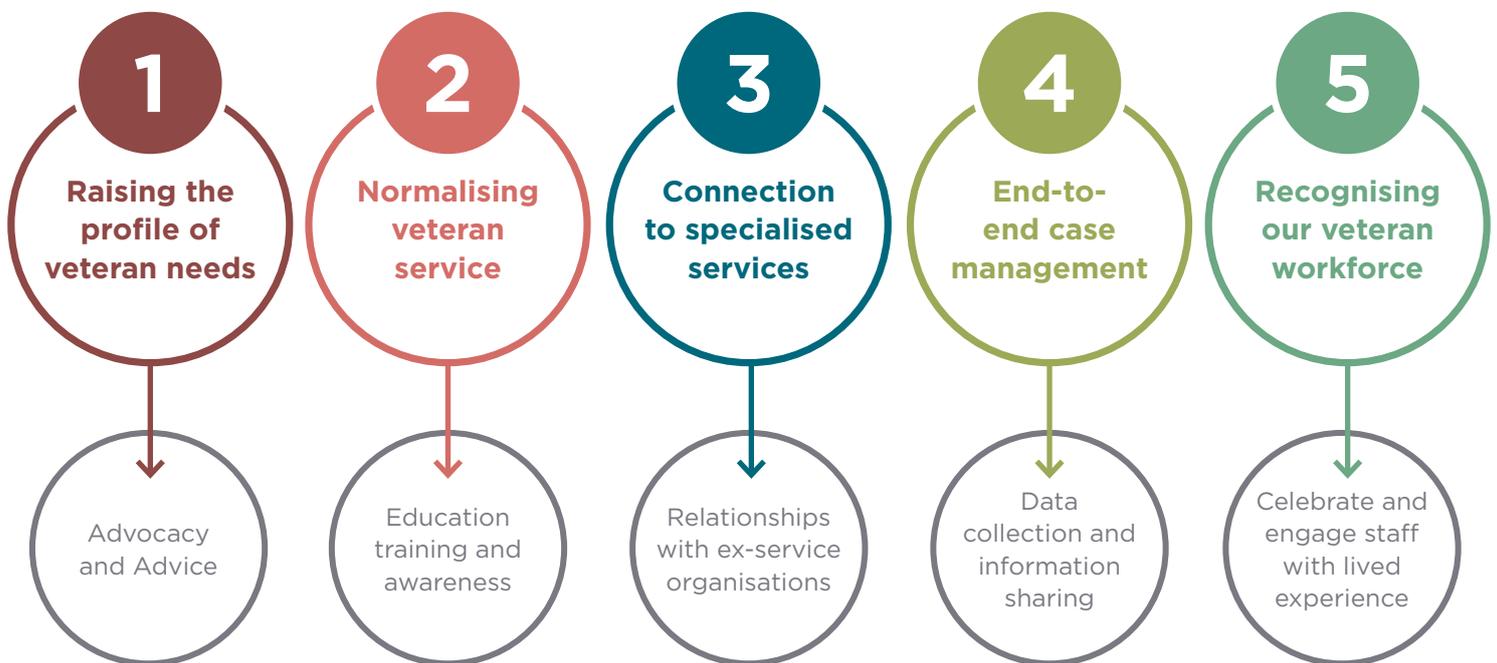
The context demonstrates a clear need to improve DCS' support to the veteran cohort of prisoners and offenders. The DCS Veteran Strategy provides a concise approach to the management of veterans through high-level guidance, underpinned by a list of principles and outcomes.

The DCS Veteran Strategy will be implemented through an associated Action Plan, which sets out what action will be undertaken in the coming four years (2021-2025). All actions are underpinned by a governance strategy and resourcing model (see page 12).

Principles

The DCS Veteran Strategy is underpinned by five principles with associated priority action areas. They are:

1. *Raising the profile of veteran needs:* to be achieved through advocacy and support.
2. *Normalising veteran service:* to be achieved through education, training and awareness.
3. *Connection to specialised services:* to be achieved through building stronger relationships with VSAs.
4. *End-to-end case management:* from prison to community, to be achieved through stronger data collection and information sharing.
5. *Recognising our veteran workforce:* to be achieved by celebrating and engaging staff with lived experience.



Outcomes

Under the foundation of the principles outlined above, the DCS Veteran Strategy seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

As a result of the DCS Veteran Strategy, veteran prisoners and offenders:

- ▶ Feel comfortable disclosing their veteran status to DCS;
- ▶ Are supported to manage the impacts of their service (such as trauma);
- ▶ Successfully transition back to community on release;
- ▶ Are less likely to reoffend and go onto desist from crime long-term; and
- ▶ Are connected to and receiving support from VSAs.

As a result of the DCS Veteran Strategy, DCS staff

- ▶ Contribute their lived experience to the Department's goals;
- ▶ Are recognised by the Department for their service;
- ▶ Are provided with opportunities to mentor veteran prisoners and offenders;
- ▶ Are better able to identify veterans;
- ▶ Understand the complex needs of veteran prisoners and offenders;
- ▶ Know how to link veteran prisoners and offenders to the support they need; and
- ▶ Are connected to and receiving support from VSAs.

As a result of the DCS Veteran Strategy, the Department:

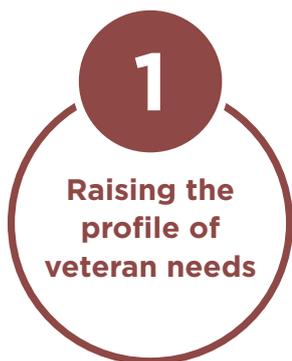
- ▶ Furthers the Department's strategic goals;
- ▶ Develops strong relationships with existing VSAs;
- ▶ Improves data collection and information sharing related to veterans;
- ▶ Provides support to veteran prisoners and offenders that is informed by the lived experience of our staff;
- ▶ Facilitates end-to-end care for veterans from prison to community; and
- ▶ Promotes the profile of veterans' needs across the Department.



Paul Kingham, Community Corrections Officer

Action Plan

The *DCS Veteran Strategy Action Plan* outlines 22 actions to be delivered between July 2021 and June 2025. These actions are divided into short-term (six months), medium-term (two years) and long-term (four years).



1 Raising the profile of veteran needs

By implementing the actions in the DCS Veterans Strategy, DCS will raise the profile of veterans' needs across the Department and to our key stakeholders.

Action 1.1	Formalise the provision of advocacy and advice by establishing governance to oversee the Veteran Strategy.	Short term
Action 1.2	Establish and implement a pilot program for supporting veterans at all DCS prison sites.	Short term
Action 1.3	Develop an issues paper to understand the needs of female and Aboriginal veterans.	Medium term
Action 1.4	Develop an issues paper to understand the needs of older veterans.	Medium term
Action 1.5	Promote the DCS Veteran Strategy to DCS staff, stakeholders and partners, and prisoners and offenders.	Medium term
Action 1.6	Develop a sustainable, ongoing model for supporting veteran prisoners and offenders beyond the term of this Strategy.	Long term
Action 1.7	Engage with academics conducting research into veteran issues.	Long term



2 Normalising veteran service

DCS will normalise veteran services through education, training and awareness for DCS staff, prisoners and offenders.

Action 2.1	Develop a staff education model to increase identification of incarcerated veterans.	Medium term
Action 2.2	Develop a communications strategy to encourage veterans to disclose their status.	Medium term
Action 2.3	Educate DCS staff on veterans' needs and support available to veterans.	Medium term

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Connection to specialised services

VSAs provide a range of supports to veterans, including housing and mental health support and are best placed to address the needs of veterans. Through the DCS Veteran Strategy, the Department will support veterans to access VSAs by establishing and maintaining effective relationships with VSAs.

Action 3.1	Formally establish and maintain relationships with VSAs.	Medium term
Action 3.2	Map referral pathways for incarcerated veterans to connect with VSAs.	Short term
Action 3.3	Determine eligibility of veterans who have served in defence forces from other countries.	Medium term

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End-to-end case management

DCS will ensure the appropriate data collection, information sharing, and referral processes are in place (and strengthened where necessary) to facilitate continuity of support from prison to community.

Action 4.1	Amend Community Corrections forms to record veteran status on intake.	Medium term
Action 4.2	Investigate options for information sharing with VSAs when veteran prisoners are released.	Medium term
Action 4.3	Conduct a feasibility study for options to provide support to veterans under DCS supervision in the community.	Long term
Action 4.4	Ensure veteran data requirements are captured in the i-Safe database.	Short term
Action 4.5	Consider if the admissions and risk assessment process address the high risk of suicide in the veteran population.	Medium term
Action 4.6	Respond to recommendations from the Royal Commission when released.	Long term

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Recognising our veteran workforce

Action 5.1	Create opportunities for veteran staff members to mentor veteran prisoners and offenders.	Medium term
Action 5.2	Ensure staff with lived experience inform the Department's future veteran service model.	Short term
Action 5.3	Recognise veteran staff members as part of the Department's ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day commemorations.	Ongoing



Governance and Reporting

Progress against the DCS Veteran Strategy Action Plan will be overseen by a Working Group. High-level oversight will be provided through DCS' Strategic Executive Meetings. Additionally, achievement against the Veteran Strategy's outcomes will be evaluated in 2025 by the Program Services Unit (PSU), Offender Development.



Strategic Executive Meetings

Strategic Executive Meetings (SEM) are held monthly and comprise senior DCS Executive staff. SEM oversee the Department's strategic agenda and key projects. SEM will receive status updates at critical milestones and deliverables.

DCS Veteran Strategy Working Group

A DCS Working Group will be established to oversee the Veteran Strategy. The Working Group will:

- ▶ Task DCS directorates with delivering actions in the Veteran Strategy.
- ▶ Oversee implementation of actions in the Veteran Strategy.
- ▶ Establish reporting and monitoring against the outcomes of the Veteran Strategy.
- ▶ Facilitate the provision of advice and advocacy to the Department on veteran matters.
- ▶ Support DCS to maintain effective relationships with VSAs.

The proposed membership of the Working Group is:

- ▶ Executive Director, Offender Development – Chair

- ▶ Prison Operations representative, with lived experience
- ▶ Community Corrections representative, with lived experience
- ▶ Aboriginal Services Directorate, representative
- ▶ Team Leader, Program Services Unit
- ▶ South Australian Prison Health Service, representative
- ▶ Department of Veterans Affairs, representative
- ▶ Senior Advisor, Veteran Services - Executive Officer

The Working Group will meet on a bi-monthly basis during the establishment phase (July 2021 to October 2021) before moving to quarterly meetings. The Working Group will report to Strategic Executive Meeting as required / requested.

Resourcing

A Senior Advisor, Veteran Services will be appointed to coordinate implementation of actions and deliver against the outcomes of the DCS Veteran Strategy. The Senior Advisor will have lived experience, as well as understanding and experience of the custodial environment. The Senior Advisor will be accountable to the Executive Director, Offender Development via the DCS Working Group.





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