



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Major General Paul Irving AM PSM RFD
President
Defence Reserves Association

Dear Paul,

As we have discussed at previous ESORT meetings, the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) is conducting an inquiry into rumours and allegations relating to the conduct of Australia's Special Forces in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016.

The Afghanistan Inquiry (the Inquiry), like all IGADF inquiries, is at arm's length from the chain of command and government to ensure independence and integrity of the process. This administrative inquiry started in 2016 and is being conducted in private.

This is a challenging but necessary process to ensure the Australian Defence Force (ADF) upholds the highest ethical standards of behaviour, identify where there may be failings and learn lessons that may be applied for the future.

My priority, and the focus for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), is the health and welfare of any veteran or their family members that may be concerned or impacted by the Inquiry or its findings. We are working closely with the Department of Defence (Defence) to ensure veterans and their families are appropriately supported by DVA and Open Arms – Veteran & Families Counselling (Open Arms).

A range of support services are available including support for mental health, medical, compensation, income support and in some cases, legal support. Ex-Service Organisations play a critical role. We encourage veterans and their families to reach out to us at this time and we hope you can pass on an important message that we are here to help. Children and teenagers have the potential to be impacted, especially by media and Open Arms has specialist resources to assist. As a community, we should also remind veterans that the alleged actions of a small group should not detract from the dedicated service provided by others that served in the Middle East.

Information on support services is enclosed, and can also be found on our website at:

www.dva.gov.au/igadf-afghanistan-inquiry-welfare-support-services

It takes courage to reach out for support, and sometimes it is easier to do this anonymously. Safe Zone Support, is a specialised anonymous counselling service with an understanding of the military culture and strategies to deal with the stress of the current situation.

ADF members involved in, or impacted by, the Inquiry continue to be supported by their chain-of-command and have access to other assistance. Information can be found on the Defence website at:

<https://afghanistainquiry.defence.gov.au/>

The Chief of the Defence Force has indicated that once the Inquiry is completed he will consider the findings carefully. Updates on the IGADF's work are available at:

<https://defence.gov.au/mjs/reports.asp>

Thank you for your support at this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to contact DVA if we can be of any assistance to you.

Yours sincerely



Liz Cosson
Secretary

15 October 2020

Supports Available

For serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families

- Department of Defence (Defence) members, their family and dependants, have access to Chaplaincy services to receive pastoral care, support or advice. Service Chaplains maintain a 24/7 call service and have support networks across Australia. To get in touch with a Chaplain, Defence or family members can either call their unit, base or ship Chaplain, or ring the Defence switch and ask to speak to the on call Chaplain in your area.
- All-hours Support Line **1800 628 036**, available 24/7. This is a confidential telephone service that provides access to mental health advice and referral for ADF members and their families.
- The Defence Family Helpline (staffed by social workers, psychologists and other human service professionals) also provides assistance, support and advice to members. The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 and can be accessed on **1800 624 608** or at Defencefamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au or online at www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Defence-Helpline.asp.

For current serving and former ADF members, and Defence personnel and their families

- Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling **1800 011 046** or online at www.openarms.gov.au. Open Arms provides counselling and support programs to ADF members and their families and operates a free-call all-hours crisis telephone service as well as providing face to face support. Members can sometimes feel more comfortable reaching out to Open Arms in the first instance as Open Arms is not part of Defence.
- Lifeline Australia **13 11 14**, available 24/7 or online at www.lifeline.org.au. Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.
- ADF Health and wellbeing portal – www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal. The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal provides information on a wide range of Defence websites containing information on ADF Health and Mental Health services and supports, as well as links to many useful external resources.
- Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) (for current and former serving ADF members) – call 1800 555 254. Current or former serving members and their families may wish to contact DVA for access to advice, claims and DVA support mechanisms.
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) **1300 687 327**, available 24/7 free. EAP is a confidential and professional counselling service available to Defence APS employees (APS), Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) employees, Australian Defence Force (ADF) Reservists, ADF Cadets, Officers and Instructors of ADF Cadets and their immediate families, and their supervisors/managers.

Further information is available on the following Web links:

IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry –
www.defence.gov.au/mjs/igadf-afghanistan-inquiry.asp

IGADF inquires Welfare Support Information –
www.defence.gov.au/mjs/welfare-support-services.asp