

RSL WODEN VALLEY SUB-BRANCH ENEWS



Have a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

December 2021

The Sub-Branch annual members' Christmas party is always a lot of fun and this year's lunch was no exception. Our popular receptionist and barista, Alex Solecka, was inducted into the *Order of Whatever It Is* hall of fame. She is pictured amongst others so honoured for the OOWII alumni photo this year.

Departing Welfare staffer Rania Kalimeris received a farewell gift and a waltz around the floor with Les Cook.

Mystery Santa made another mysterious appearance, awarding the lucky door prizes.



Christmas
IS COMING
SOON





On Tuesday 8 December the Volunteers Information Session with Liz Marshall from Dementia Australia.



Final Carers Friendship Group for 2021





Newsroom

Media Centre

Latest news for veterans

Social media

Meet our veterans

75 days, 75 stories

Vetaffairs

DVA services during the holiday season

Feedback

1 December 2021

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will continue to provide support to veterans and their families during the holiday season. However, please be aware that some services will be impacted from Christmas Day 2021 to Monday 3 January 2022 inclusive.

Counselling, mental health support and crisis accommodation

The Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling line is available to support members of the current and ex-service community and their families 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Phone 1800 011 046 toll-free.

Safe Zone Support is an anonymous counselling line that's available 24/7 to support members of the current and ex-service community and their families. Phone 1800 142 072 toll-free.

If you require urgent assistance, please call 000. If you are unwell, please contact your local doctor or go to your nearest hospital.

Short-term crisis accommodation is available for eligible people. Please phone 1800 011 046 or visit www.openarms.gov.au

For further mental health information and support, visit www.openarms.gov.au

Transport bookings for medical treatment

DVA staff will be available to process transport requests for medical treatment on 29, 30 and 31 December. Please call 1800 550 455.

The service will be closed on 25, 26, 27 and 28 December and 1, 2 and 3 January, resuming 4 January. If transport is required on these days and has not been pre-booked, you can pay for the travel and seek reimbursement when we re-open. Or, if you are an existing [MyService](#) user, you can make new transport bookings and review existing trips online.

For travel in an emergency always dial 000.

Defence Service Homes Insurance

For enquiries, or help with an insurance policy or claim, phone 1300 552 662. This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For payments, phone 1300 304 989 for the cost of a local call.

Hospital admissions

Doctors can admit DVA patients into hospital over the holiday period and request retrospective approval for the admission, where required, when DVA resumes full services.

Pharmaceutical approvals

There will be no reduction in services across the Christmas/New Year period. Providers seeking prior approval for pharmaceuticals can call the Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC) 24 hours a day on 1800 552 580.

Pension payments

Pension paydays are not affected over this period. The last payment in 2021 will be on Thursday 30 December 2021. The first payment of the New Year will be Thursday 13 January 2022.

Incapacity payments

The last Incapacity payment of 2021 is 23 December. You may receive your Incapacity payment earlier on 20-21 December 2021. The next payment after this is due on 6 January 2022, although this may also be paid earlier on 4-5 January.

However, because of differing arrangements by various banks during the holiday period, which are beyond DVA's control, the precise day of the week you receive this payment may differ from usual. You may wish to make arrangements to ensure you have enough funds to cover any direct deposit payments.

VAN offices, General Enquiries and Open Arms centres

As usual, DVA offices and shopfronts, and general enquiry services will be closed for the Christmas / New Year period from Saturday, 25 December 2021, reopening on Tuesday, 4 January 2022.

This includes DVA's General Enquiries phone line and email services, DVA's Veterans' Access Network (VAN) offices interview service and Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling centres (note that, as mentioned above, the Open Arms and Safe Zone counselling phone lines will remain open 24/7 throughout the holiday season).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Fifth Annual Statement on Veterans and their Families

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) (15:23): by leave—At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month our nation fell silent to observe Remembrance Day and honour all those who have given their lives in the defence of Australia and the freedoms that we so often take for granted. It was an incredibly moving experience to lay a wreath at the Stone of Remembrance at the Australian War Memorial, and to pause to remember the more than 100,000 Australians who have given everything defending our country, our values and our freedoms.

Australian War Memorial

As time marches on, the Australian War Memorial remains a perpetual and poignant reminder of our sacred duty to honour each and every one of them. Of course, the memorial looks quite different at the moment as work continues on the \$500 million development project, which will ensure it remains at the heart of Australia's continuing story of service and sacrifice. The original sandstone architecture and the sacred areas within the memorial will remain unchanged. The role of our service personnel in peacekeeping operations and Afghanistan will rightly be a focus. Not only is the memorial a place to honour our veterans; it is also a place to learn, and a place to heal.

At the memorial is the Tarin Kowt Wall, a recreated blast wall signed by hundreds of Australians who have served in the Middle East. Blast walls protected Australian personnel at Tarin Kowt for more than a decade, and many signed their name as they left the base for the final time. Those who didn't get the opportunity to sign the original wall, and also those who did, are now invited to sign the wall at the memorial as a record of their service and a symbol of their important contribution to international peace and security. I was told of a young veteran who very much wanted to sign the wall but could not face the crowds and attention during opening hours. The caring and dedicated staff at the memorial arranged a private visit for him and some of his mates, and he finally had the opportunity to put his name on the wall, which helped him get the closure he so badly wanted. Part of the new and expanded gallery space at the memorial will be dedicated to displaying all panels of the signed wall.

Afghanistan withdrawal

I know that Australia's withdrawal from Afghanistan has been particularly difficult for many veterans, service personnel and their families. The confronting scenes the world witnessed in August have resonated more acutely for those who were there. As the situation was unfolding, I directed my department to reach out to our defence community as well as their family members to offer additional support.

I also had the opportunity to personally meet with ex-service organisations and many who served in Afghanistan, to offer support and to hear their voices and their stories. I was pleased that all whom I met acknowledged the importance of our national contribution. As one veteran told me, 'Every single one of us that went knows the difference we made on the ground when we were over there.'

I say to the 39,000 Australians who deployed to Afghanistan that you should be very proud of your service and what you achieved there. Your families are proud and we, as a nation, are proud. We will never know how many terrorist attacks were prevented and lives saved because of your service and your sacrifice. You also improved medical services, built critical infrastructure and helped a generation of women and girls access education and build careers. Our nation will never forget your enormous contribution in making Australia, Afghanistan and the world a safer and better place. And we will never ever forget the 41 Australians who lost their lives in that conflict.

The experience of our contemporary veterans, including those who served with such distinction in Afghanistan, highlights the critical importance of providing ongoing support for our veterans and their families. This year, the Australian government is investing \$11.7 billion in funding to support around 336,000 ex-service personnel and their family members.

Veteran Wellbeing Centres

This funding includes more than \$40 million to establish a network of Veteran Wellbeing Centres across Australia which provide access to a range of support services better targeted to the specific needs of veterans and their families in local communities. These services include health and wellbeing, employment, training, housing, peer support, entrepreneurial pathways and volunteering opportunities. Services are already up and running in Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Nowra, Wodonga and Townsville.

Shortly after coming into this role, I travelled to Townsville—Australia's largest garrison city and home to some 8,000 veterans and their families—to see firsthand the positive impact the Oasis Townsville Wellbeing Centre is having on local veterans. I even enjoyed a coffee from the veteran-run coffee shop—very well made, I might add.

We committed further funding in the May budget for additional facilities in Tasmania and South-East Queensland. I am very keen to see the Veteran Wellbeing Centre network expanded and built upon into the future.

Grant programs

The Australian government is investing \$32 million this financial year alone in grant programs to help the many groups that provide complementary services to our veterans. The veteran and community grants, grants-in-aid, the building excellence in support and training grants, the supporting younger veterans grants and the saluting their service commemorative grants are available to assist the many ex-service organisations in their valuable and vital work.

I have had the privilege to speak with many ex-service organisations, both large and small, and have enormous respect for the critical role they play in providing mateship, advocacy and welfare support. There are too many to name here, but I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you on behalf of the Australian government and the nation for the work that you do.

Veterans' Health Week

This year the Australian government has provided a record \$540,000 funding to support the largest ever Veterans' Health Week, with the theme 'Get Moving'. More than 730 events took place around the country, all aimed at bringing the community together to improve veterans' physical and mental health. In fact, there were so many events it should really be called Veterans' Health Month! Initiatives included group walks and runs, water sports, seminars and workshops, dance classes, and even a scavenger hunt. All of them were aimed at bringing the community together to improve health and wellbeing. I was particularly impressed with the event organised by 98-year-old Second World War veteran Reg Chard. Reg left his job as an apprentice baker when he was just 18 to fight on the Kokoda Track. This year, almost 80 years on, Reg led a dozen companions on a 1,000-step tour of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in Sydney.

We know that staying active can have many flow-on positive effects to physical and mental health, and it's such a critical part of the transition and recovery process for many veterans.

I was delighted and honoured to recently help launch 'Invictus Australia', which is delivering sport recovery programs and services to improve the health and wellbeing of military veterans and their families. It means Invictus now has a permanent home down under. We are the first country in the world to be given the honour of using the Invictus name outside of the iconic games. Sport is the lifeblood of our nation, and Invictus has put Australians with their own stories of recovery, grit and determination on the world stage. They are Aussies with the stamina, courage and passion we can all admire.

We need look no further than the Paralympics and Paralympians to see what our veterans can achieve in sport. I'd like to take this opportunity to salute the remarkable achievements of the veterans who did our country so proud at the recent Tokyo Paralympics.

Curtis McGrath, a former Australian Army combat engineer, lost his legs to an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. As he was being stretchered out he told his mates, 'You'll see me at the Paralympics.' Just four years later he won gold in Rio in the paracanoeing. I had the pleasure of speaking with Curtis about his time in Afghanistan and his gruelling training schedule before he headed to Tokyo, where he secured two more gold medals.

Also in the team was paracyclist, Stuart Jones, a former Australian Army military police officer. I was delighted to speak to Stuart upon his return from Tokyo. Both cited their training and experiences in the Army as having given them the resilience, determination, discipline and ability to overcome the challenges that they have faced. Curtis and Stuart are incredible individuals, and I congratulate them and all of our Paralympians on their extraordinary achievements. And I know everyone in this place joins me in doing so.

Census

This year for the first time, the census asked the question: 'Have you ever served in the ADF?' When this census data is released, the Australian government will have a clearer picture of how many veterans there are, where they live and key demographics such as their age, education and employment status. This will enable the Australian government to better target support to veterans. It will also enable me to prioritise resources to areas of greatest need, and it will help with the important work of addressing high homelessness and incarceration rates among our veterans—two issues which I'll be taking up with our states and territories in the very near future.

Identifying fallen soldiers

We remain focused on ensuring the service and sacrifice of all our service men and women is appropriately commemorated and remembered by both current and future generations. Recently, I laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and added a poppy to the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial, in memory of Able Seaman Thomas Welsby Clark. Eighty years after the Australian warship HMAS Sydney (II) was lost off the West Australian coast, Tom—as his family called him—was identified as the previously unknown sailor whose body was found near Christmas Island, three months after the ferocious clash with the German raider the Kormoran. His was the only body recovered from that tragedy. To finally learn Tom's name, rank, service number and home town 80 years after he was lost is truly remarkable, and it was an honour to pay tribute to him and to all of those who were lost in that ferocious battle with the Kormoran all those years ago.

I was also honoured to recently announce the identification of two First World War soldiers both buried in unnamed graves in France. Albert Nicholson, a driver in the 14th Field Artillery Brigade of the First Australian Imperial Force, was killed by shellfire at Villers-Bretonneux on 3 August 1918. Lieutenant James Mark Kenney,

from the 26th Battalion of the First Australian Imperial Force, died near Flers on 5 November 1916 after his unit attacked German trenches. Thanks to years of painstaking research, these three men have been now identified, giving answers to their families and allowing arrangements to be made for appropriate memorials at their gravesites.

It says a lot about Australia that despite the decades that have passed our nation is still working so hard to identify those who sacrificed everything for our nation to ensure that we keep and honour the sacred commitment to remember them.

We have much to be proud of when it comes to recognising and supporting those who have served our nation. But we must always strive to do things better. That is what the Australian people expect us to do, and it is what I am committed to doing in the veterans' affairs and defence personnel portfolios. There are numerous areas where improvements can be made. Three of them include the transition from defence to civilian life, veteran claims processing, and harmonising legislation.

Transition

Our Defence Force members are highly trained and disciplined and bring a wide array of unique skills, making them an asset as employees in the civilian workforce and valuable members of the community. However, when the time comes to leave the military, many of our servicemen and women sometimes struggle to find their feet and to make that transition smoothly.

There has been good work in recent years to improve the transition process, including DVA engaging earlier with ADF members, embedding Veteran Support Officers on 56 bases and defence adopting a tailored needs-based approach that includes the use of transition coaches. But there is much more to do. That is why the Australian government provided \$17.7 million over four years in the 2020-21 budget to establish the Joint Transition Authority within the Department of Defence. The work of the JTA is of critical importance, and I am keen to see it fast-tracked. It is one of my top priorities.

Undoubtedly, a key element of a successful transition is finding meaningful employment soon after leaving the ADF. Accordingly, we will continue to focus on getting veterans into jobs. The Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program was designed to increase job opportunities for veterans by raising awareness of the skills and experience that veterans bring to the civilian workplace. Part of the program is the annual Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards, and I was delighted to be able to congratulate this year's finalists and winners.

Ben Davoren, winner of the Veteran Employee of the Year Award, was deployed on combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and is now sharing his ADF knowledge and experience to train first responders through TacMed Australia. Veteran Entrepreneur of the Year Chris de Bono started Meru Foods, a miso fermentation business in Tasmania which now services the Australian and international restaurant market. It is very innovative. Both are great examples of what veterans can bring to the private sector. With 125 nominations received from a diverse range of industries, it is clear Australian businesses are recognising these benefits.

Claims

Another key priority in this portfolio is to speed up the veterans claims processing system. The backlog needs to be cleared with empathy, sympathy and compassion. In the recent budget, \$98.5 million was delivered for hundreds of new claims processing officers for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. But I don't want to see these officers dropped into an inefficient system, tangling themselves up in red tape. That's why independent consultants McKinsey & Company have been brought in to improve the system and cut waiting times as a matter of urgency. McKinsey will soon deliver an action plan to me that will include clear milestones and deliverables that can be tracked, measured and monitored.

Legislation

Another area of focus is harmonising veterans' legislation. Veterans' legislation has long been cumbersome and confusing for veterans to understand, and so I have instructed DVA to create a road map to harmonise the three acts dealing with veterans' compensation and rehabilitation. This is a long term piece of work, but it is vitally important that it begins.

I have also progressed the Defence Legislation Amendment (Discipline Reform) Bill 2021, which I introduced into the parliament in August. Our military discipline system provides the Australian Defence Force with an Australian legal framework that is able to be applied on operations anywhere in the world. However the system of discipline in the Australian military has become slow and sometimes unresponsive under the weight of administration required to address minor breaches of discipline. Reform is required to modernise our current system that predates modern warfare, technologies, and tactical requirements and the way our Defence Force is organised. I look forward to the bill's passage through the parliament.

In the last sitting period, the government also introduced the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Exempting Disability Payments from Income Testing and Other Measures) Bill into the parliament in response to the Independent Review into the TPI Payment conducted by Mr David Tune. In 2019, Mr Tune was commissioned by this government to review the TPI payment. In his review, Mr Tune highlighted the disadvantage faced by TPI veterans in private rental arrangements. The bill implements recommendations from the Tune review and will simplify the payments and related administrative arrangements for veterans. The measures include exempting disability pension as income under the Social Security Act, removing a means test imposed on rent assistance for certain veterans and dependants, and also simplifying the indexation for the disability pension. In short, these changes will make life easier for veterans, so they can access the support they deserve without having to contend with a complicated bureaucratic process. The bill also includes a measure to implement a two year pilot of non-liability rehabilitation. This will enable veterans participating in the trial to access DVA rehabilitation services earlier, without the need to make a claim for compensation or await determination of liability.

As I said, there is much more work to be done across a wide range of issues, including the destigmatisation of mental health issues in the ADF; the ongoing efforts to stop bullying, abuse and sexual assault; and the adoption of new treatments and procedures for veterans, to name but a few.

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, which has now commenced public hearings, will be a watershed moment for Australia. Over coming months, we will hear many heartbreaking and tragic stories from veterans and those who have lost loved ones to suicide. They will be stories of loss, anguish and pain. Difficult though these stories will be to hear, our nation must listen to them and must hear them. Those stories are being told in the hope that our country will ensure no-one else has to go through what these veterans and families have endured. We must not let them down. Mistakes and failings must be acknowledged. Truth must be told. Actions must be taken. This is the moment.

The royal commission is a crucial piece of national work that I hope can be a catalyst for positive change in the treatment and care of servicemen and women and their families, both now and for future generations. Our country asks so much of the men and women of the ADF and we owe it to them and our veterans to make sure that this royal commission and its findings lead to lasting results. As part of the royal commission process, every effort must be made to ensure that families are able to access the service records and other documents relevant to the service of their loved ones.

I acknowledge the work of the Interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention by Dr Bernadette Boss which was recently tabled in parliament. It's an important piece of work, and I wish to acknowledge the diligence with which it was prepared and carried out. Her report made findings on the prevalence, risk factors and systemic issues relevant to ADF member and veteran deaths by suicide. The report provides invaluable preliminary findings to the Australian government in preventing future deaths by suicide in the veteran community. Importantly Dr Boss stated: 'action cannot be delayed until the conclusion of the royal commission'. We will not wait for the royal commission to get cracking on reform.

Conclusion

We have an obligation, as a grateful nation, to support the lifetime wellbeing of our servicemen and women. I'm honoured to represent the veteran and defence community. Each day I advocate to ensure their voices are heard, their needs are met and their service to this nation is recognised. I'm determined to address the high rates of suicide amongst the ADF and veteran community. And I'm determined to deliver even better outcomes for veterans and their families. They have given us their best, and, in return, it's only right we give them our best.

Displayed with pride at the Australian War Memorial is a portrait of Australia's first Victoria Cross recipient, Sir Neville Howse. Sir Neville won his Victoria Cross during the Boer War, risking his own life to save the life of another. Under heavy fire, his horse was shot from underneath him before he carried his wounded comrade to safety. Besides being a soldier he was also a surgeon and a statesman, serving in our parliament as the federal member for Calare. He also served as mayor of my hometown of Orange. In March 1929 the Western Champion newspaper described Sir Neville as 'the best friend that the soldiers possess, with hundreds of soldiers who can thank him for the splendid way in which they have been treated'.

May this parliament and the departments that support it always be guided by the example of Sir Neville Howse.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

OG0329



Christmas Close Down

**The RSL Woden Valley
Sub-Branch office at Holder
will close from noon Friday
17 December 2021 until
3pm Monday 3 January
2022**

Christmas break for Eddison Day Club meetings with Peter Sutton

Last meeting this year on 17 December 2021

First meeting of new year on 14 January 2022

Contact Us

Give us a call for more
information or access to our
services

**RSL Woden Valley
Sub-Branch
14/27 Mulley Street
HOLDER ACT 2611**

62851931

admin@rslwoden.org.au

Visit us on the web at
www.rslwoden.org.au

Or drop in for a coffee Fridays
from 10.00am

Our office hours are
9am-3pm Mon-Fri

Did you know?

**E-News, Current Items of
Interest and *The
Serviceman* are also
readily available to read
on our website**

www.rslwoden.org.au