

# Towards Greater Veteran Wellbeing

A Feasibility Study to Support Veterans and their Families in the ACT

**Final Report - December 2020**

Submitted by Yellow Edge Pty Ltd



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# Executive Summary

Yellow Edge has been privileged to be a part of this important study.

In working with the Community Services Directorate (CSD) of the ACT Government, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), the veteran services sector, community leaders and through a survey, the first of its kind in the ACT, of over 400 veterans and their families, we have been exposed to a strong shared passion for, and commitment to veteran welfare.

Our findings suggest that the vast majority of veterans in the ACT are in a reasonably good position. Many of their needs continue to be met through a combination of services provided by DVA, mainstream ACT Government services and a broad range of services provided by the veteran services sector. This is a pleasing finding and would suggest that there is time and space for a planned approach to improvement.

There are areas that could be improved and strengthened so that basic veteran care can be expanded to overall wellbeing in a way that would sustain and enhance the overall quality of life for veterans.

We also suggest that there is room for the ACT Government to play a stronger role in acting as a catalyst for the maturing, better coordination and sustainability of the veteran services sector in a way that would empower veterans and their families to be better able to identify and access services. This also includes the establishment of tele-health services for veterans and their families which would complement the current services provided by the Sector and ACT mainstream tele-health and other nationally available tele-health services, as well as provide capacity for contingency and surge in demand.

This report provides a profile of the ACT veteran community, the first of its kind in the ACT and forms a foundation on which the ACT Government can build an even richer picture of veterans and their families in the ACT over time.


The Report makes six recommendations and provides a roadmap that would contribute to the enhancing of wellbeing for veterans and their families in the ACT over the next three years.

Yellow Edge would like to express its thanks for the kind cooperation we have received from all stakeholders engaged in this study and especially to the veterans and their families who responded to the survey.

We commend this report to the ACT Government for consideration.



Andrew Simon  
*Managing Director*  
Yellow Edge



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Yellow Edge

# Recommendations

**1. That the ACT Government firm up on its role in relation to the care of veterans and their families. This role would include:**

- Channelling the focus to be on the wellbeing of veterans and their families.
- Strengthening the environment of wellbeing in the ACT.
- Acting as a catalyst for the maturing of the veteran services sector.
- Establishing an ACT veteran wellbeing network that interacts closely with, learns from and contributes to the existing Commonwealth Veteran Wellbeing Centre Network.
- In partnership with the Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, supporting and commissioning research into areas relevant for the wellbeing of veterans and their families in the ACT and nationally.

**2. That the ACT Government enhance awareness of health and social services amongst veterans and their families. This includes:**

- Establishing an ACT veterans gateway.
- Providing a service provider toolkit and competency training.

**3. That the ACT Government invests in the ACT's healthcare workforce in veteran care related skill sets. This includes:**

- Clear referral pathways and processes.
- Continued investment in health infrastructure and services.

**4. That the ACT mainstreams tele-health services for veterans and complements this with a veteran specific tele-health service that has access to national capabilities. This includes:**

- Mainstreaming telehealth services for veterans within ACT health services.
- Outsourcing the provision of some veteran tele-health services to the Sector.

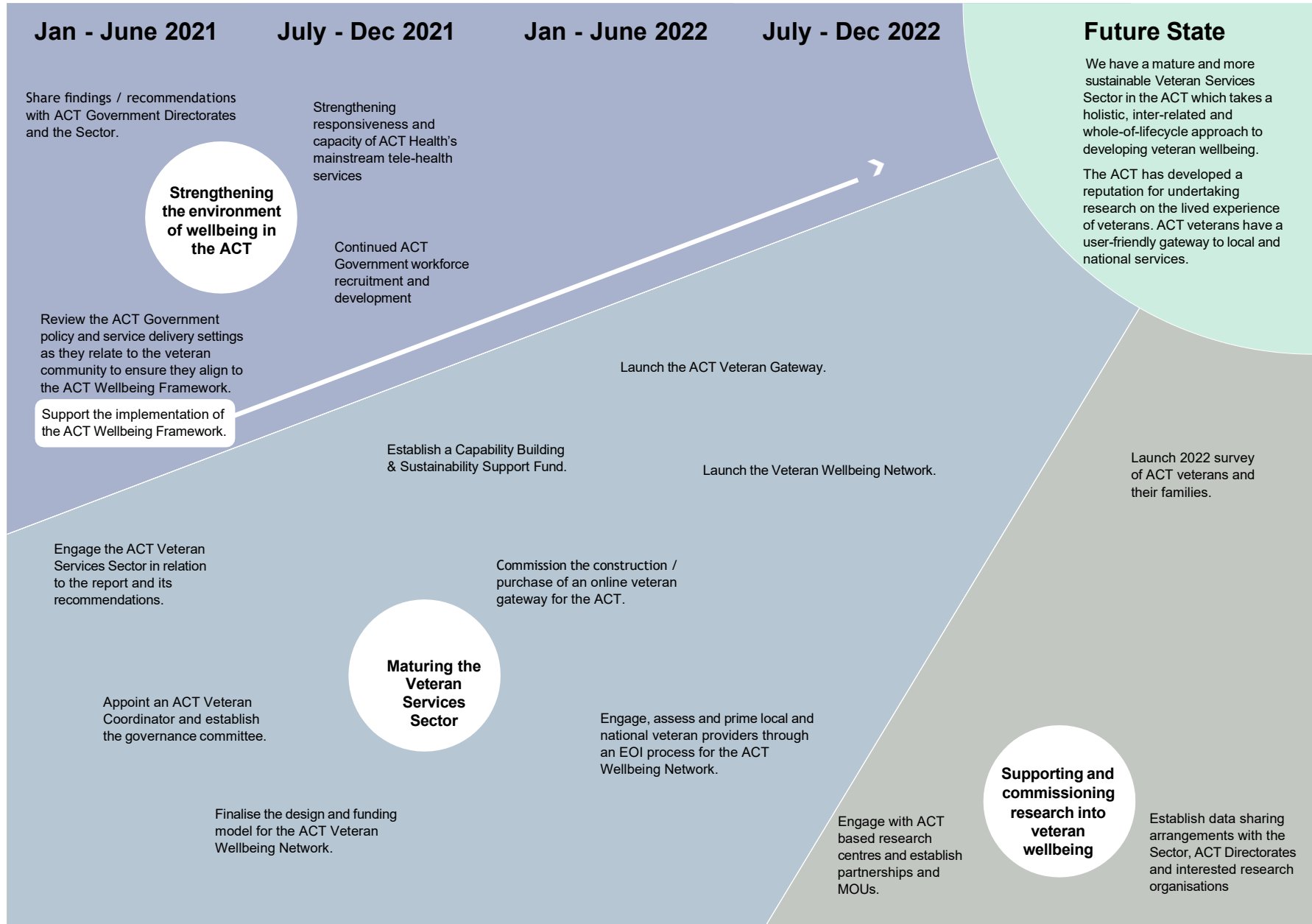
**5. That the ACT Government drives stronger sector coordination. This includes:**

- Appointing an ACT Veteran Community Coordinator.
- Improving data collection and coordination.
- Establishing a sector governance committee.

**6. That the ACT Government implements sustainable funding arrangements. This includes:**

- Instituting an industry levy.
- Establishing a Capacity Building & Sustainability Support Fund.

# A roadmap for enhancing wellbeing in the ACT



# Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Consider the evidence related to mental health and wellbeing of veterans nationally.
2. Assess service demand and capacity to support veterans with mental health needs locally and nationally, with a focus on rural and remote locations that could link to services if tele-health/digital-health facilities where available.
3. Determine the scope of services needed to support wellbeing in veterans that may be accessing via tele-health/digital health.
4. Propose a staged approach to delivering a national centre. We anticipate that this centre could take the form of a digital hub or centre of excellence.
5. Consider the possibility of contributing to national research related to the wellbeing of veterans.
6. Consider the benefits of research partnerships whose expertise might be included if a national research centre was to be considered.
7. Outline the design of such a service and how links would be developed nationally.

# Methodology

There were four phases to the project:

1. Start-up Phase: this involved the Yellow Edge and Orima team meeting with the ACT Government and DVA to confirm the purpose and function of the study, the desired outcomes and outputs, the key success indicators, key stakeholders and data requirements and firming up of project approach and timeframes.
2. Discovery Phase: Guided by a Data Collection Strategy, the discovery phase involved documentary and data analysis, desktop research and stakeholder interviews. The purpose of this phase was to build a clearer picture of the ACT veteran community, its unique characteristics, its needs and the extent to which these needs are being met, and service delivery opportunities and challenges.
3. Veteran Survey (primary data) Phase: The online survey, distributed via networks and through existing relationships, collected key demographic information on the veteran community along with data pertaining to their needs, their awareness and usage of services and their preferences around methods of engagement.
4. Solution Design Phase: Based on the survey results and key findings to date, Yellow Edge developed a "Towards Veteran Wellbeing Roadmap" which identifies a series of measures and initiatives that the ACT Government can implement to strengthen and grow the veteran community's wellbeing under the ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework.

## Context

Over the last seven years or so, the Dept. of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) together with its State and Territory counterparts have been driving transformation in the approach to assisting veterans and their families.

DVA has introduced a suite of reforms, payments and service initiatives including launching in 2019, a national network of Veteran Wellbeing Centres—in Townsville, Darwin, Adelaide, Nowra, Perth and Wodonga—in partnership with ex-service organisations (ESOs) and state and territory governments. These Centres provide localised advocacy services and social connectedness, community engagement, health and wellbeing services, transition and employment support to the veteran community and allow for closer integration and coordination of government and non-government support.

As part of the initiative, the ACT Government approached DVA to ascertain their interest in exploring opportunities to strengthen the health and wellbeing of ACT veterans and their families through the provision of a nationally integrated and connected service which would employ tele and digital service delivery models to service both the local and national veteran communities.

In early 2020, the ACT Government, in partnership with DVA, agreed to commission an independent feasibility study to explore potential services as well as opportunities to tap into, and contribute to centres of veteran research excellence. The ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework was used in this project as a way to define, frame and scope the nature of wellbeing for ACT veterans and their families given that they are members of the ACT community and would be naturally included in services, programs and activities that the ACT Government would provide under such a comprehensive framework. The ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework consists of 12 domains:

1. Access and connectivity: this is to do with getting around to places we value and accessing the services we need.
2. Economy: this is to do with sharing in the city's economy
3. Education and lifelong learning: this is to do with gaining skills and education at all stages of life
4. Environment and climate: this is to do with the environment sustains all life now and into the future.
5. Governance and institutions: this is to do with having a say, being heard and working together for better outcomes
6. Health: being healthy and supported with the right care
7. Housing and home: this is to do with having a place to call home
8. Identity and belonging: this is to do with being able to express identity, feel a sense of belonging and participate fully in society
9. Living standards: this is to do with having the financial resources to live life well
10. Safety: this is to do with feeling safe and being safe
11. Social connection: this is to do with being connected with family, friends and community
12. Time: this is to do with having time to live well.

The ACT Government's 2020 Wellbeing Framework and its domains is consistent and aligns well with the DVA Veteran Wellbeing Framework, which identifies seven areas critical to wellbeing including: health, education and skills, housing, social support, employment, income and finance and recognition and respect.

# A profile of the ACT veteran community

There continues to be limited data and evidence on the veteran community at both the local and national level. Whilst both the Productivity Commission's 2019 'A Better Way to Support Veterans' report and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) 2018 Veteran Profile go some way to painting a picture of veteran wellbeing, there remain persistent and significant challenges associated with profiling the wellbeing of Australian veterans.

This section provides a profile of the ACT veteran. The profile is however based on and is therefore limited to respondents to the 2020 survey of veterans and their families conducted as part of this Study.

## Number of veterans

### The exact number of ACT veterans living in the ACT remains unknown.

Whilst the 2020 ACT Region Veteran Community Service Needs and Awareness survey, commissioned as part of this Feasibility Study, captured the perspectives, and needs of 210 ACT veterans and their family members, it represents a small fraction of the veteran community.

In April 2020, the Dept. of Veteran Affairs (DVA) recorded 11,746 clients residing in the ACT, 86% were veterans<sup>1</sup>. It is likely that the number of ACT veterans and their families accessing supports through DVA represent a proportion of the total ACT veteran community.

	Total veterans	Total dependents	Net Total
ACT survey respondents	173 (82%)	37 (18%)	210
DVA clients	10,075 (86%)	1,702 (14%)	11,746

Notes: (1) 'Net Total DVA Clients' consists of any person in receipt of a pension/allowance from DVA or who is eligible for treatment or pharmaceuticals paid for by DVA. (2) Some clients may be eligible as both a veteran and a dependant. For this reason, total clients may not equal the sum of veterans and dependants.

The inclusion of a question about service in the ADF in the 2021 Census will provide further understanding of the number of veterans in the ACT and where they live.

## High level of life satisfaction

### ACT veterans express the most satisfaction with their lives compared to their state and territory counterparts.

On average, ACT veterans report a high level of life satisfaction (average 7.26) followed closely by their family (average 7.05). This is supported by the Dept. of Veteran Affairs' client satisfaction survey data in which ACT veterans report a global life satisfaction score of 82%, compared to their NSW (78%) and Northern Territory counterparts (80%).

Satisfaction in the areas of future security, community connectedness, achieving in life and health are generally lower for all States and Territories including the ACT as compared to satisfaction in the other wellbeing categories. This suggests that ACT veterans and their families would benefit from stronger attention and focus in these four categories of wellbeing.

<sup>1</sup> Veteran Profile by Local Government Area (March 2020) <https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/publications/datastatistical/LGAprofile/igasmar2020.pdf>

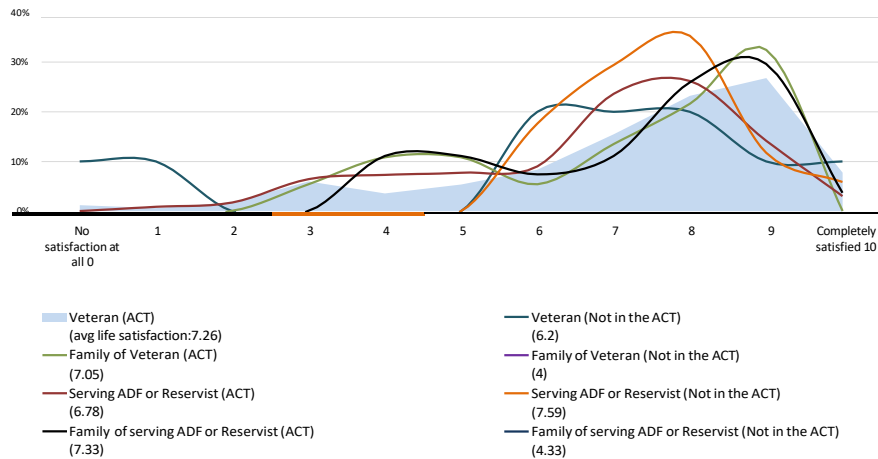


## Overall life satisfaction scores by survey respondents

ACT Region Veteran Community Service Needs and Awareness Survey

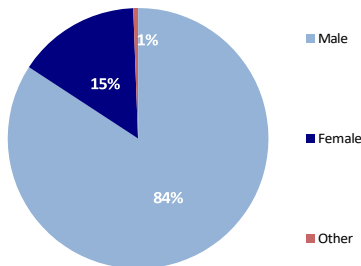
Commercial-in-confidence

### q16. Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole? (Summary across respondent profiles)



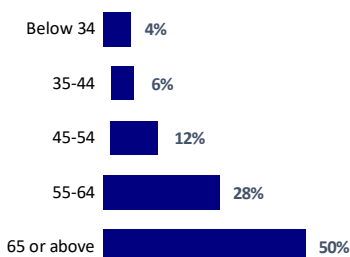
## Predominately male

The ACT survey respondents were predominately men (84%). This is in line with the AIHW's findings where more than 4 in 5 serving or reservist personnel identified as men<sup>2</sup>.



## Majority of veterans 55 years and older

Half of the ACT survey respondents were 65 years or above and more than three-quarters (78%) were aged 55 years or more. This is congruent with the Dept. of Veteran Affairs' client profile where 55% of all DVA clients are aged 70 and over<sup>3</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> AIHW: "A Profile of Australia's Veterans 2018". Sourced from Page 3, November 2020 at aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx

<sup>3</sup> AIHW: "A Profile of Australia's Veterans 2018". Sourced from Page 3, November 2020 at aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx

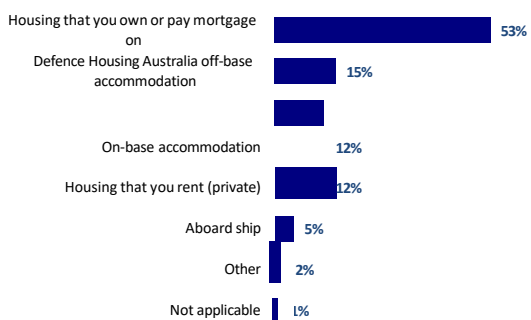
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## Majority of veterans in secure housing

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53% of ACT survey respondents reported having lived in housing that they owned or paid a mortgage on. In 2015, the AIHW reported that 94% of ADF personnel discharged between 2010 – 2014 were in stable housing<sup>4</sup>.

### q21. Where did you live at your last posting?



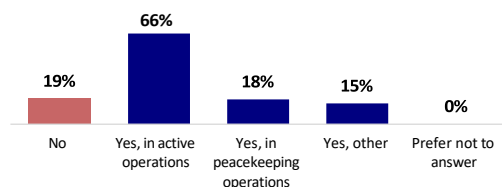
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## High levels of active deployment

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Two-thirds of ACT respondents (66%) reported having been deployed in active operations overseas and a further 18% in peacekeeping operations.

### q20. Were you deployed in operations overseas while in the ADF?



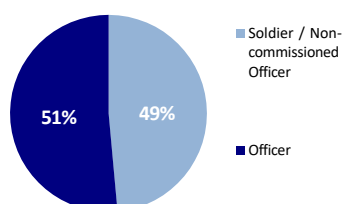
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## A large officer cohort

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Over half of ACT respondents (51%) held an officer position upon leaving the ADF.

### q18. What was your last rank you held before leaving the ADF?



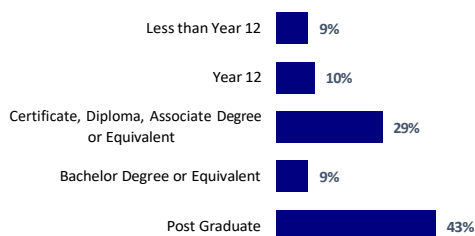
<sup>4</sup> AIHW: 'A Profile of Australia's Veterans 2018'. Sourced from Page 25, November 2020 at [aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx](http://aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx)

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## Higher educational attainment

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More than half of ACT respondents (52%) held a bachelor's degree or higher. At the national level, 1 in 5 transitioned ADF members reported holding a university degree, and a further 29% had their highest educational qualification as a certificate, and 21% a diploma<sup>5</sup>.



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## Lower membership of ESOs.

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The five ESOs with branches in the ACT have a combined local membership base of approximately 3,000 individuals. At the national level more than a quarter (28%) of recently transitioned members reported joining an ex-service organisation<sup>6</sup>. There is a sense that membership rates are somewhat lower in the ACT however without knowing the total population of veterans living the ACT, it is difficult to say for certain the level of ESO membership take-up within the ACT veteran community.

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<sup>5</sup> AIHW: "A Profile of Australia's Veterans 2018". Sourced from Page 29, November 2020 at [aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/veterans/a-profile-of-australia-s-veterans-2018/pdfs/235.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> AIHW: "A Profile of Australia's Veterans 2018". Sourced from Page 26, November 2020 at [aihw-phe-235.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/veterans/a-profile-of-australia-s-veterans-2018/pdfs/235.pdf.aspx)

# General observations and 11 key findings

We have been privileged to be a part of this important study. It has exposed us to a wide variety of stakeholders and interested parties all of whom are passionate about supporting veterans and their families. Through our discussions with the veteran services sector, community leaders and understanding of the data from over 400 veterans and their families collected via the online ACT veteran community survey as part of this study, we have been given privileged access to views and perspectives. In digesting and synthesising these, we make several general observations as project consultants. These are followed by 11 key findings and a set of conclusions that we draw.

## General observations

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### Recognition that things can be improved.

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This study canvassed views from a wide range of stakeholders in the veteran services sector. It seems clear to us that there is a keen desire in the Sector to understand how to improve the way veterans and their families in the ACT are supported. There was a keen desire to see the service provider Sector mature in its ability to provide more complex services, to strengthen capacity, to build greater sustainability in the Sector and to be innovative in the kinds of services that could be offered.

We observed that there was also a keen desire for stronger coordination in the Sector so that limited resources and capacities could be better leveraged and optimised, and that the sharing of knowledge and information could be enhanced to strengthen the evidence base for effective practice.

The recognition that things can be improved is an important first step in actual improvement and we are encouraged that this desire for continual improvement will result in a positive maturing of the Sector in the ACT.

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### The desired role of the ACT Government seems unclear.

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While the scope of this study has been clear, we observe that what seems less clear is what role the ACT Government would like to play in supporting the veteran community in the ACT.

The role of government for example could range from the provision of direct assistance and support to adopting a full market based solution or some form of hybrid mix. The ACT Government's policy setting for veterans and their families and the role that veterans themselves should play seem unclear. We observe however that there are very useful strategic roles that the ACT Government can play and we identify and propose five key roles in this Report.

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### There is a diverse and wide range of wellbeing services available through the veteran community.

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The services environment for veterans and their families appears to be a vibrant one. There are many small and large providers providing a range of services. The ESOs and VSO operating in the ACT provide services in the area of entitlements and advocacy, psychological and counselling services, welfare and referral services, outreach programs and a large number of social and sporting activities

including yoga classes, coffee catchups, peer mentoring, dragon boating and self-defence classes (refer to the Interim Report for a full list of services).

These services appear to complement the more formal range of health-related services currently provided by the Commonwealth and ACT Government agencies. Services provided by ESOs and the VSO appear to be focused on mental health related services, the provision of information and services which provide social connection and peer support.

Many services and activities are organised and managed by volunteers who have a deep sense of care and responsibility for their fellow veterans. Many ESOs and the VSO have also moved to a digital services delivery model given the COVID 19 pandemic. There are examples of psychological and counselling services, social connection services and employment and training related services being delivered via phone and digital delivery platforms. While there are varied levels of sophistication and maturity in the use of digital or tele-based services amongst different service providers, the trend towards such delivery models to complement or even replace face to face services is strong.

All this does suggest that there is no obvious market failure, even if some services face severe supply constraints and some individuals will be compelled to wait or to turn to other sources of support. The need for new services including tele-health is not clear or self-evident. We observe however, that having a telehealth capacity would assist in meeting surge demands or contingency due to unexpected crises or conditions. On the whole, we observe that veterans who have a need, are aware of and are able to access the services they need.

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### However, the Sector appears uncoordinated.

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The veteran services sector comprising ESOs and a VSOs in the ACT appears to be uncoordinated. There appears to be internal competition amongst providers in the Sector and there are no clear long term priorities that the Sector is working to address. Needs identification is very local and short term and information on needs where this exist with some providers is not shared with other providers given the competitive nature of the Sector. The competitive environment in an already broader competitive not for profit sector in the ACT also results in competition for scarce managerial and specialist resources and for funding.

It is also interesting to note that there is no Peak Association or body which would provide some Sector leadership and representation.

While it is clear that service providers place the interest of their veteran clients at the heart of their operations, the interests of veterans and their families could be even better served with better coordination, greater collaboration and sharing of information and better practice and a smarter approach to funding for the Sector. This Report provides ideas for better coordination and funding.

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### There is little research to do with the ACT veteran or to do with the lived experience of veterans as they journey through life.

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The Interim report to this study provided a comprehensive summary of veteran related research centres and their areas of current research interest and focus. We observe that while much of the research will relate to and be relevant to veterans and their families in the ACT, specific research about veterans in the ACT context is absent. We also note there appears to be little strengths based or success based longitudinal research in the area of Lived Experiences of veterans and their families as they build new lives after leaving the ADF.

We note in this submission that the area of Live Experience is a potential area of research where the ACT Government and Dept. of Veterans' Affairs could work together on, in partnership with research centres in the ACT.

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## Wellbeing is an important and useful policy and service delivery framework for the support of veterans and their families.

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Thinking and approaching the support of veterans and their families in terms of their wellbeing is a positive, strengths based, forward leaning and outcomes-based posture. Wellbeing is an outcome in itself and it provides an inclusive and holistic conceptual framework or organising principle for the development of policy and for service delivery for the support of veterans and their families in the ACT.

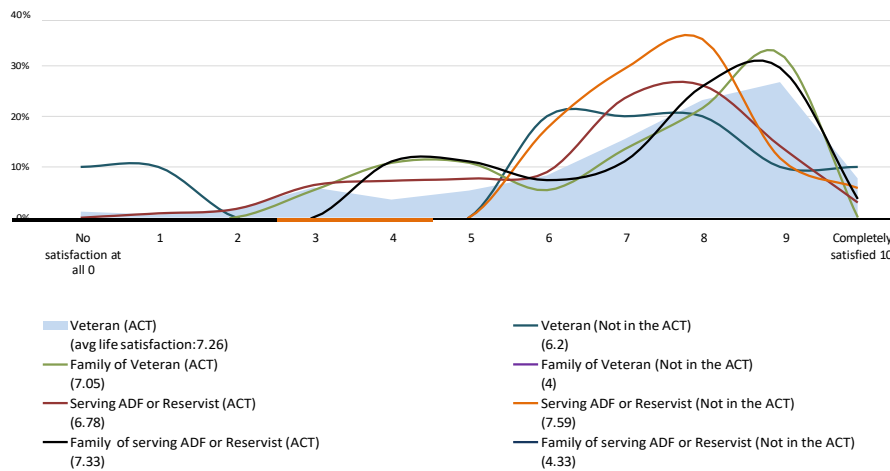
We observe that the use of the ACT Wellbeing Framework covering 12 wellbeing domains, as a way to focus attention, to guide the development of policy, implementation, and monitoring of services for the broader ACT community will result in the strengthening of the overall quality of life for veterans and their families in the ACT as well.

The ACT Wellbeing Framework is foundational to operationalising wellbeing support for veterans and their families in the ACT. The Framework has been used through this study to shape stakeholder discussions, survey questions and the analysis of data.

# 11 key findings from the ACT veteran community survey

## Finding 1: Veterans are generally satisfied with their life and personal circumstances.

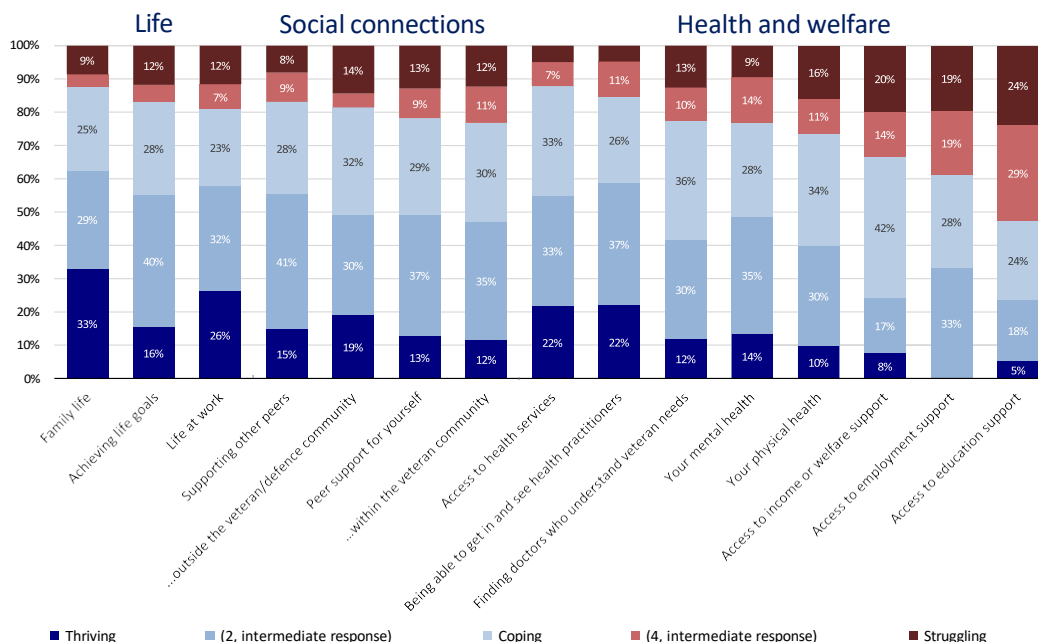
**q16. Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole? (Summary across respondent profiles)**



25

## Finding 2: Veterans are generally coping well in life, with their social connections and in their health and welfare.

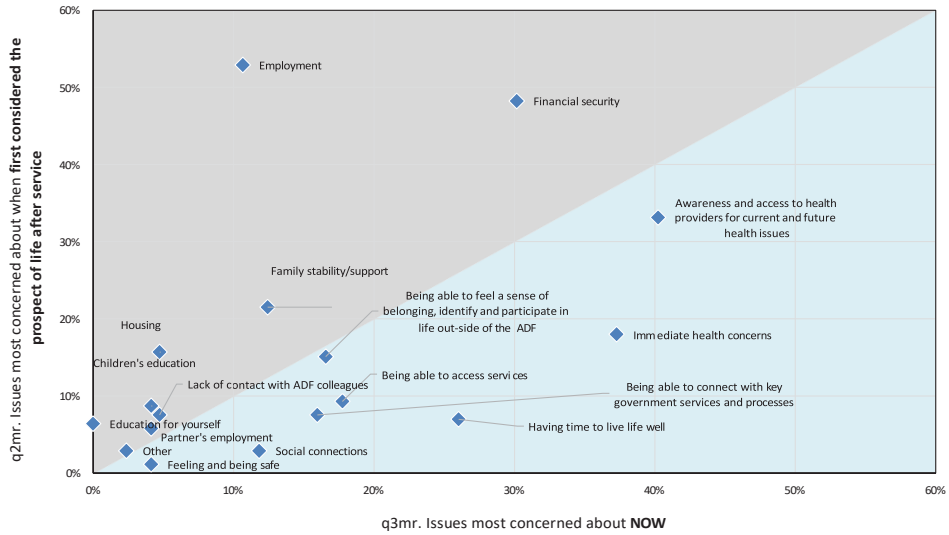
**In the last three years, how would you describe the following aspects of your:**



### Finding 3: Veterans' perspectives on their needs change over the course of their lives.

#### q2mr vs q3mr. Issues most concerned about now vs when first considered the prospects of life after service in the ADF?

Base: Veterans in the ACT (n=169-172)

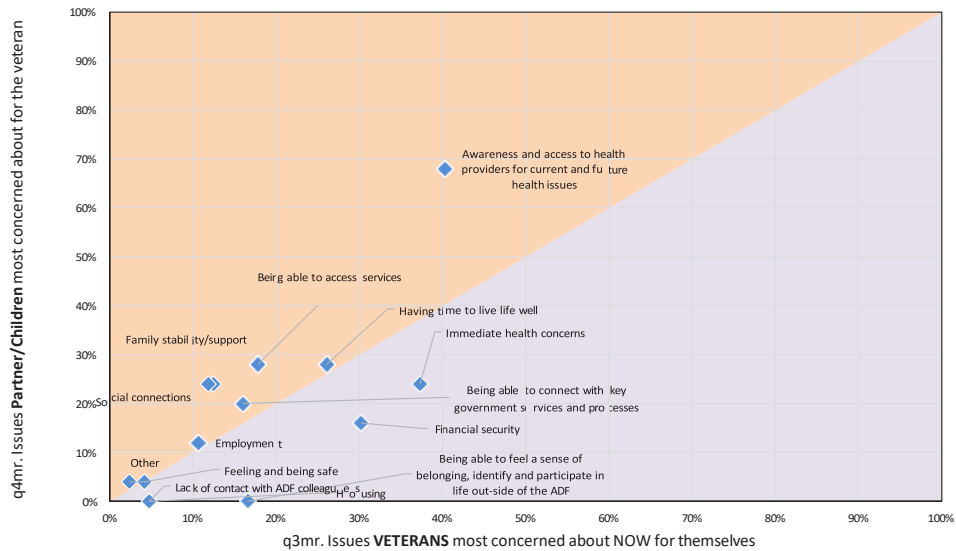


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### Finding 4: Veterans and their families are concerned about access to health providers.

#### q3mr vs q4mr. Issues veterans/serviceman most concerned about for themselves vs issues family members most concerned about for veterans/serviceman

Base: Veteran (n=169) and Partner/Child of Veteran (n=25) in the ACT

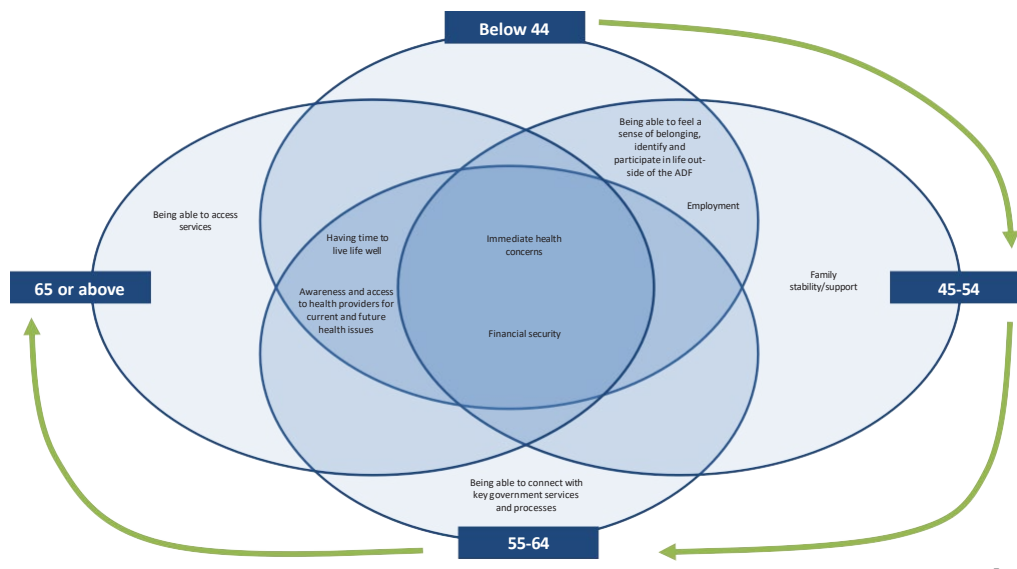


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## Finding 5: Veterans' concerns change with age.

### q3mr. Issues most concerned about now (Top five) – across age groups



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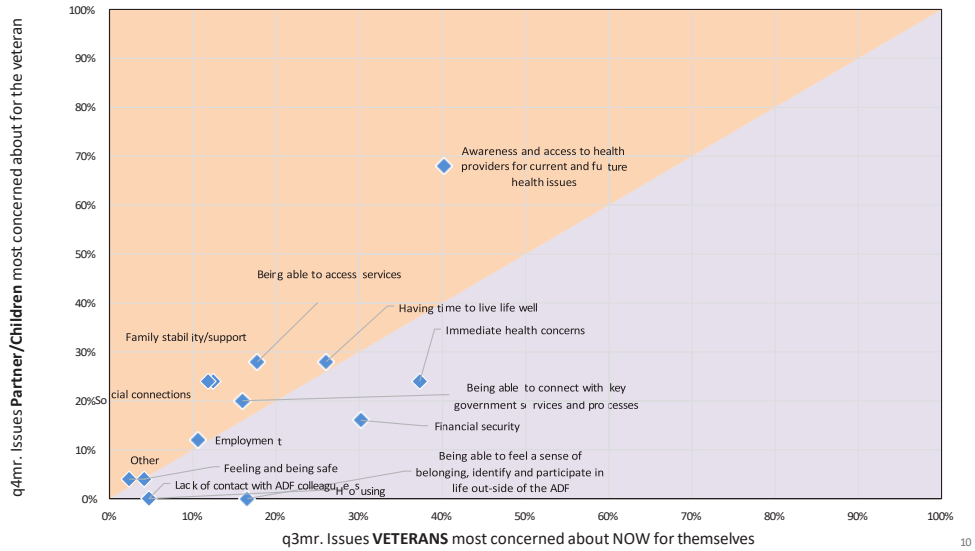
This change of needs over time from separation presents an opportunity for veteran support and wellbeing services to be pegged to significant life events or stages. According to the AIHW's 2018 Older Australians at a Glance report, the burden of disease, which is a standard method for analysing the causes of health loss was highest for 65–69-year olds and remained relatively constant at this level. Whilst most have good health, older veterans are more likely to experience several health conditions at the same time.

## Finding 6: Veterans are aware of services and use them.

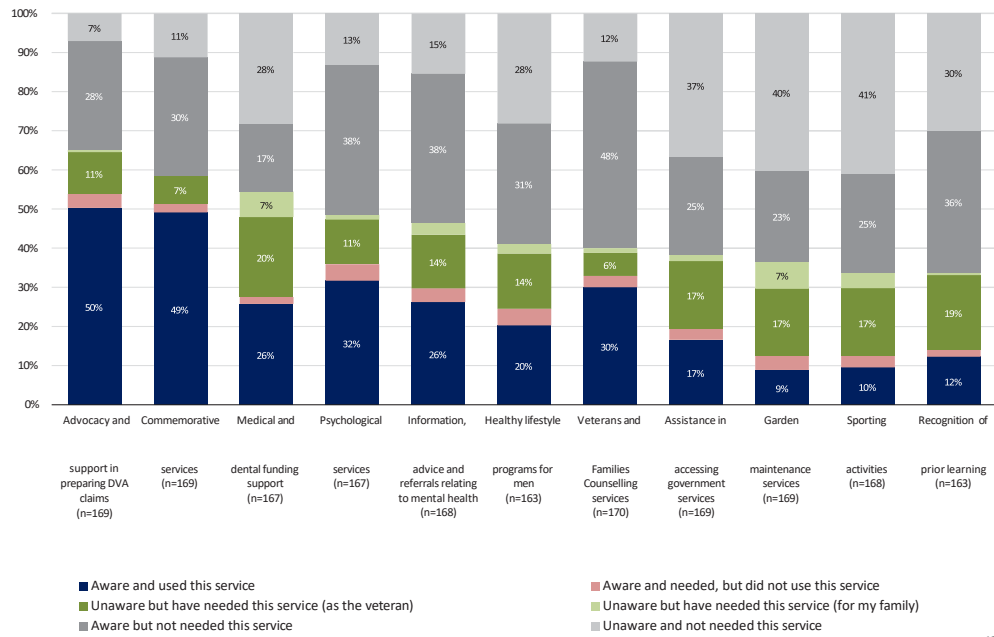
On the whole, ACT veterans are aware of the support services they need. This is reflected in the high levels of awareness, usage and need for support and assistance especially with DVA claims, veteran counselling services and commemorative services. It is worth noting that these services have traditionally been provided by the RSL and government funded services such as Open Arms and are highly accessed and valued by the community.

### q3mr vs q4mr. Issues veterans/serviceman most concerned about for themselves vs issues family members most concerned about for veterans/serviceman

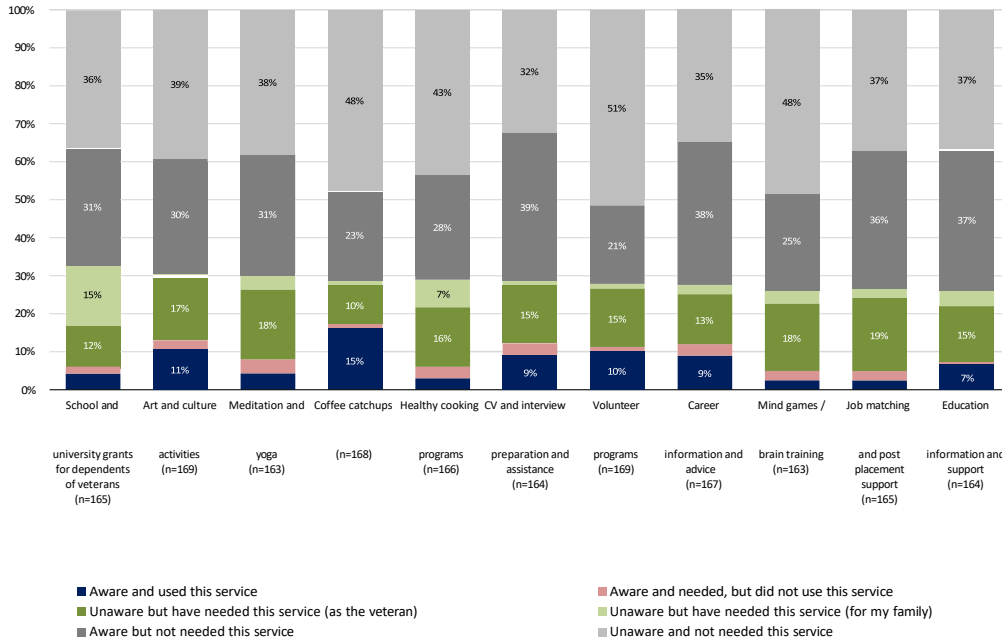
Base: Veteran (n=169) and Partner/Child of Veteran (n=25) in the ACT



### q6. Awareness, Usage and Need for Services

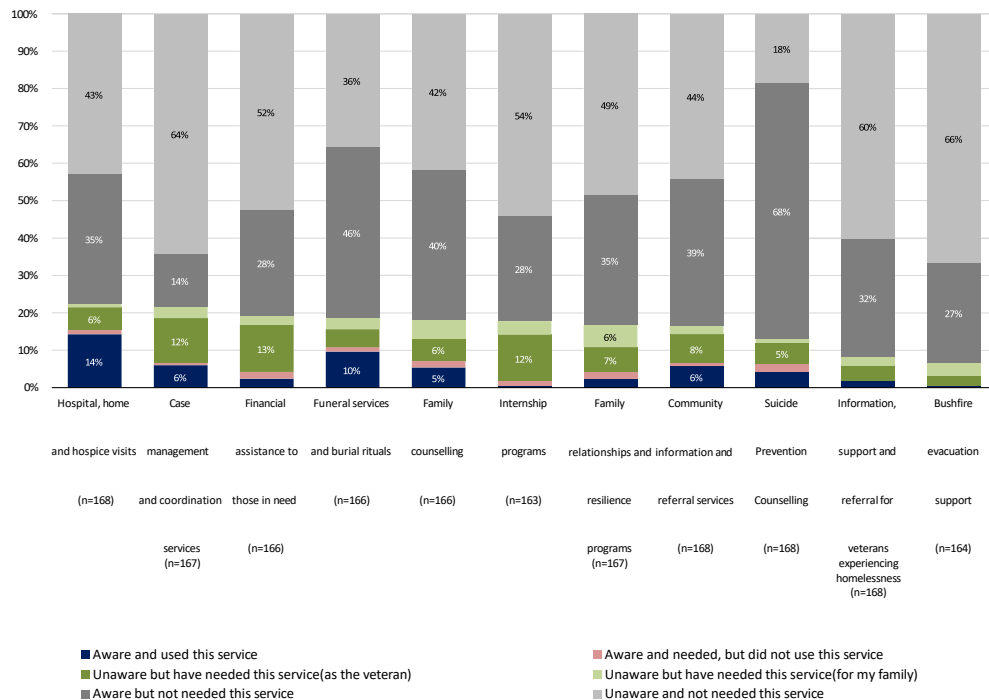


## q6. Awareness, Usage and Need for Services



13

## q6. Awareness, Usage and Need for Services

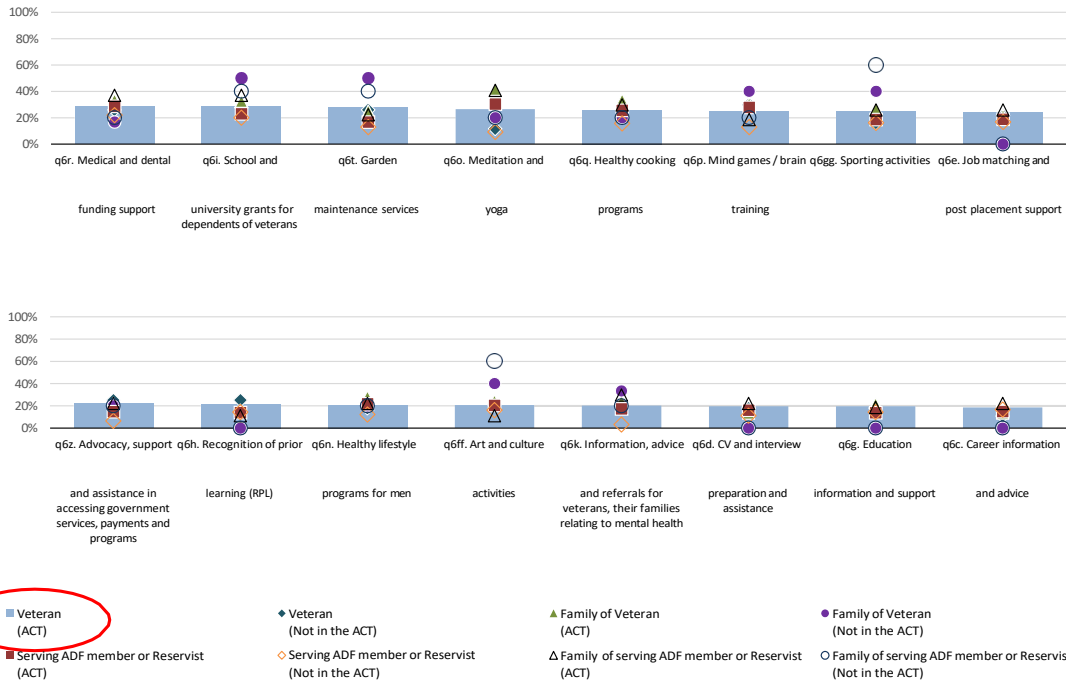


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## Finding 7: There are areas where some levels of demand are not being met.

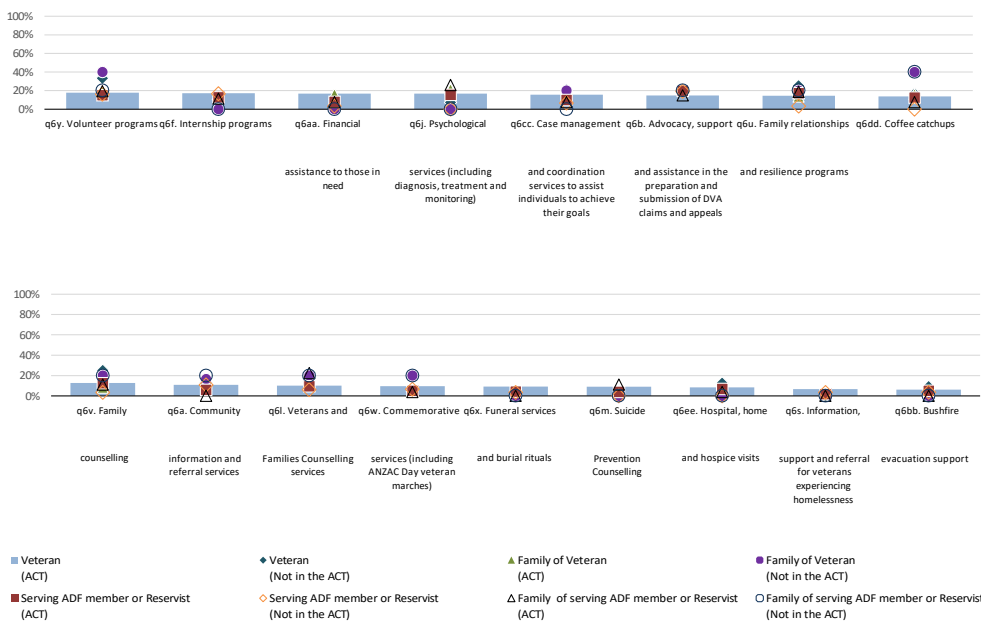
### q6. Level of un-met demand for services (1/2)

% Not aware of the service but have needed it for myself, Not aware of the service but have needed it for my family, Aware of the service and needed it but did not use it



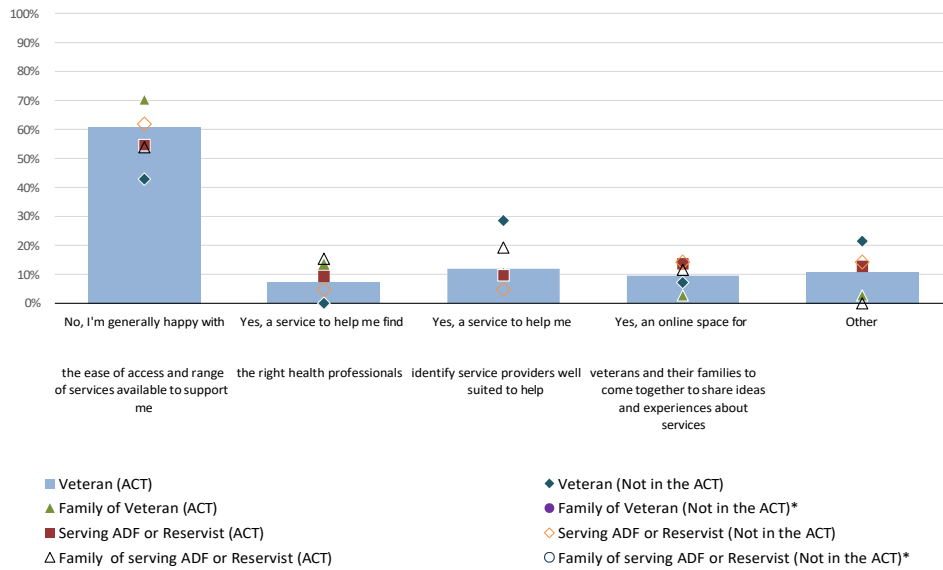
### q6. Level of un-met demand for services (2/2)

% Not aware of the service but have needed it for myself, Not aware of the service but have needed it for my family, Aware of the service and needed it but did not use it



## Finding 8: Veterans are generally happy with ease of access and the range of services, but some assistance in some areas is desired.

### q12. Is there one key improvement that could be made to help you better access services that may support you as a veteran?

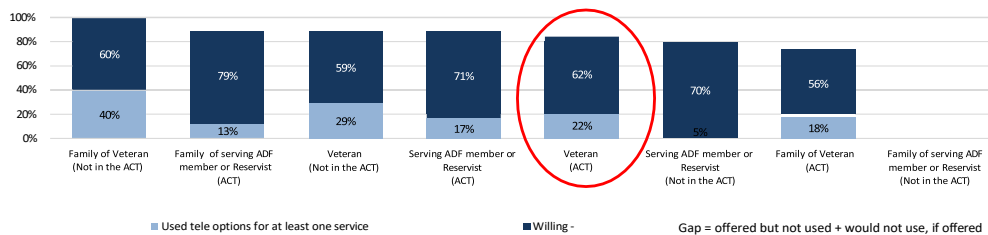


\* Results not shown due to insufficient response numbers

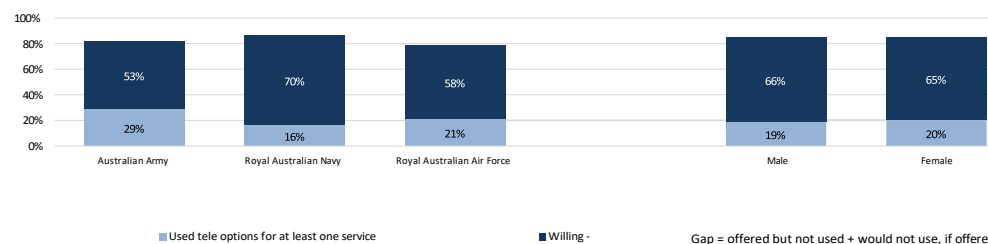
## Finding 9: While only some veterans have used tele options recently, most appear to be willing to do so.

### q7. Usage of tele options (for at least one service)

#### Respondent cohort

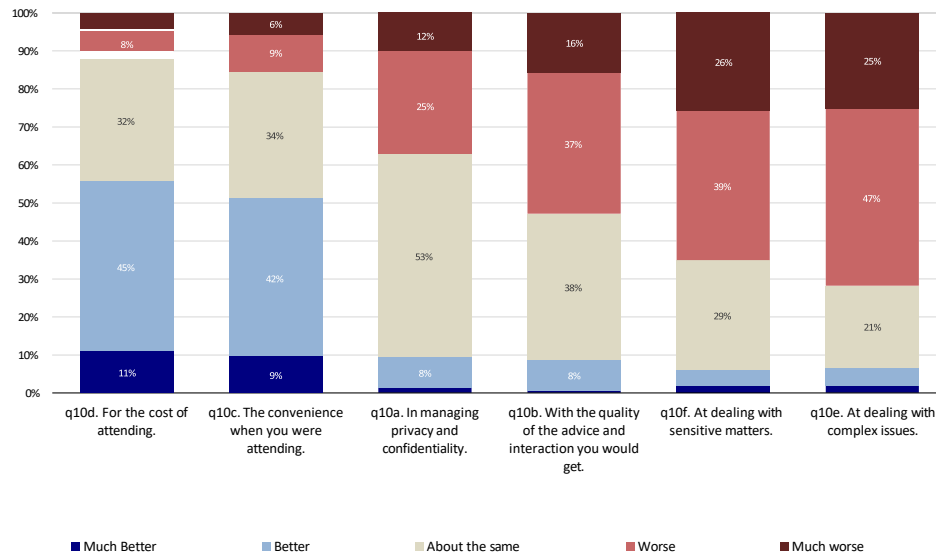


#### Service and Gender



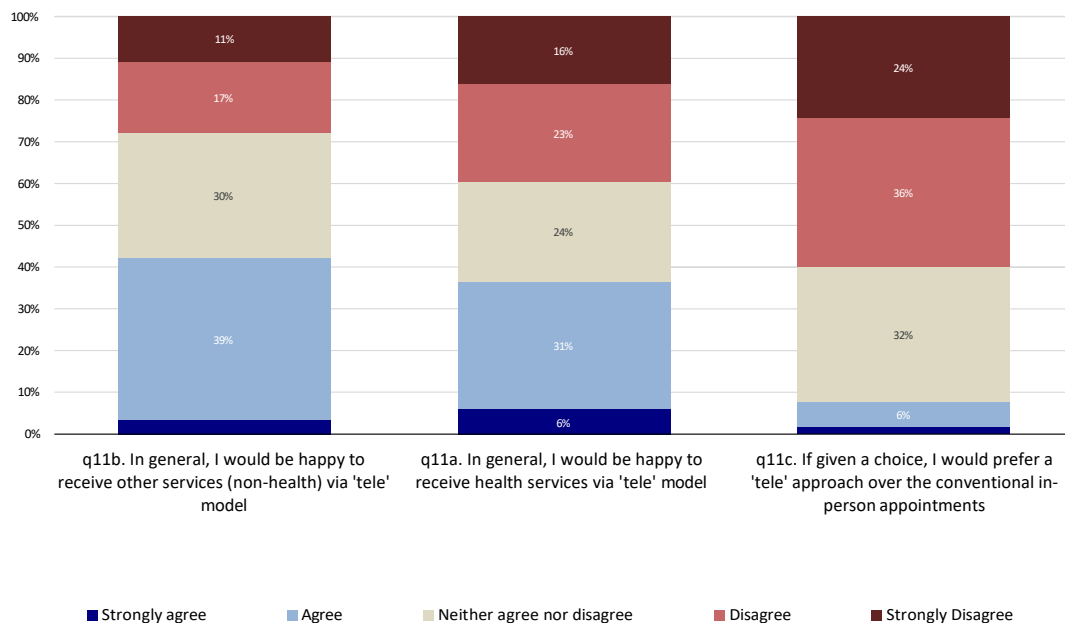
**Finding 10: However, veterans may not be convinced about tele services especially with when it comes to quality, privacy, complex and sensitive matters.**

**q10. How do you think a “tele” delivered service would compare to a conventional in-person service?**



**Finding 11: Veterans appear lukewarm about receiving telehealth services.**

**q11. Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.**



# Conclusions from observations and findings

While our observations and findings are generally positive and encouraging, there are several areas which would benefit from greater attention and focus. We provide several conclusions below. We address these conclusions in the following section where we provide possible responses or solutions.

Our conclusions include:

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## Wellbeing for veterans.

Support for veterans in the ACT is not just about health. It involves attention to other social determinants and in the provision of services that contribute to social connection, identity and belonging and employment and other essentials that contribute to wellbeing and quality of life. Wellbeing is an outcome in itself and it should be a common and shared policy and service delivery framework for the ACT Government and for the Sector.

A focus on strengthening wellbeing for the ACT community will inevitably strengthen veteran wellbeing.

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## Easier awareness and access for veterans to the range of services available especially for health and social connection related services.

Access to the broad range of services and service providers in the ACT for veterans and their families does need to be improved. This can be achieved through the establishment of a single or primary web based user friendly Gateway to the Sector. This would enable veterans and their families to understand and access the range of local or national services and service providers easily as well as to connect with other veterans.

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## Deploying digital and telehealth services in a targeted manner.

It is anticipated that digital or telehealth services will become a growing part of the service delivery mix for veteran related (and indeed mainstream) services. As people become more comfortable with this mode of service, take up will naturally increase across more service areas including the provision of complex services. However, in the short term, the deployment of digital and telehealth services in the ACT should be used for relatively simple services, or to complement face to face interactions or to help with surges in demand.

Digital and telehealth services which are connected with national providers will also help with capacity issues or lack of supply issues in some services in the ACT.

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## Role of the ACT government

The ACT Government can play a clearer enabling or catalytic role in supporting veterans and their families. As a national priority population, veterans do hold a special place in Australian society. While veteran policy is generally the responsibility of the Commonwealth, and veterans and their families do access mainstream ACT government services, there are other non service delivery roles that the ACT government can consider leaning into which would assist the Sector to be better positioned for supporting veterans and their families. Further detail is provided on pages 25-29.

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## Strengthening capacity of the sector to meet demand.

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While there is no obvious market failure, the Sector does face capacity constraints and there is a lack of contingency capacity to cater to unexpected surges in demand. There is need to expand capacity especially in more complex areas such as mental health support, psychiatry, counselling and peer to peer support specifically for veterans with complex needs. These capacity issues are exacerbated by a relatively small population base in the ACT where physical access to specialists like psychiatrists, counsellors and psychologists may be limited.

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## Anticipating veteran needs as they age.

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Part of enabling the Sector to build capacity is to assist the Sector to anticipate needs as veterans leave the ADF and age over time. The Sector may need to explore building service models which anticipate and keep pace with changing needs over time and which then allow for forward leaning workforce planning and capability development.

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## Sector coordination.

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The Sector and veterans and their families will benefit if the Sector is better coordinated and more collaborative. This can be facilitated by the ACT Government which can play a coordinating role and act as a catalyst for the maturing of the Sector for veteran wellbeing outcomes.

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## Funding for the sector.

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The Sector operates within a very competitive and crowded not for profit sector in the ACT. The competition for revenue from the community and from governments is stiff. A sustainable funding model is required for the Sector for it to be able to mature over time. Further detail is provided on pages 38-39.

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## Opportunities for research.

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The ACT Government has the opportunity to partner with research centres here in the ACT to conduct research that is ACT specific, based on Lived Experience and is of practical value to veteran wellbeing and to the Sector.



# Towards wellbeing for ACT veterans

We propose focus on six areas which together will assist in enhancing veteran wellbeing in the ACT. These areas include:

- The role of government.
- Enhancing awareness.
- Investing in the ACT's health care workforce and infrastructure.
- Mainstreaming tele-health services.
- Strengthening sector coordination.
- Sustainable sector funding arrangements.

## The role of the ACT Government

While this study has not uncovered any significant unmet needs amongst veterans and their families in the ACT, it has observed that there are possible strategic roles which the ACT Government could play in supporting veterans and their families.

We suggest five key roles:

### **1. Channeling focus on the wellbeing of veterans and their families.**

Health outcomes are a significant area of concern amongst veterans, especially as they age. However, health is only one of many other determinants that impact the quality of life of veterans and their families especially amongst younger veterans, for veterans who transition from service into the broader community and as veterans and their families build and journey through new lives.

The ACT Government is in a strong position to reframe the care of veterans from one that is conventionally dominated by a narrow health perspective to a broader and more encompassing wellbeing perspective. As detailed in the ACT's Wellbeing Framework, wellbeing is concerned with a broader range of interrelated factors which combine to impact a person's quality of life. Attention to wellbeing would have strong preventative and protection value for veteran health in the longer term since health is fundamental to wellbeing. As well, it will help address other determinants such as financial security, employment, social connection, identity etc which impact on the resilience and quality of life for veterans and their families, as these determinants also do for other members of the ACT community.

This focus would require the ACT Government to base any veteran related policy, program design and service delivery initiatives on more holistic and interrelated veteran wellbeing criteria and outcomes.

### **2. Strengthening the environment of wellbeing in the ACT.**

The gradual but full implementation of the ACT Wellbeing Framework offers the potential for the general wellbeing of all people living in the ACT to be strengthened for an even better quality of life over time. In the current times of uncertainty, the strengthening of wellbeing and community resilience becomes even more important.

Expanding from a health to a wellbeing frame of reference will mean that any focus on, and investment made in the strengthening of wellbeing of the general community in the ACT will inevitably benefit the wellbeing of veterans and their families in the ACT. The Interim Report submitted for this

study mapped the various services currently provided by the ACT Government to the ACT's Wellbeing Framework. An assessment was provided on the relevance of these services to veterans and their families. The Interim Report found that most current services provided by the ACT Government were relevant or somewhat relevant to veterans and their families. The Interim Report also highlighted a range current services which are, or have the potential to be delivered via tele/virtual modes.

The ACT Government is well placed to drive and lead the strengthening of the environment of wellbeing in the ACT by implementing all twelve domains of its Wellbeing Framework and in so doing contribute to the general strengthening of wellbeing of veterans and their families in the ACT.

### **3. Acting as a catalyst for the maturing of the Veteran Services Sector**

The Veteran Services Sector across Australia and in the ACT appears to be a diverse and fragmented one.

From RSLs to organisations like Soldier On, to smaller self-organising community led groups and even employee led veteran support groups in public and private sector organisations, the Sector in the ACT is characterised by its relative informality. It is also important to note that veterans and their families have access to mainstream services provided by the ACT Government and services provided by other national providers such as Open Arms, Legacy, Beyond Blue, Lifeline and so on.

The Sector across Australia and in the ACT is characterised by noticeable internal competition amongst various providers for fund raising, a lack of data sharing, a dilution of organisational capacity as providers stretch to provide a wide variety of niche services as a way to carve out their own value proposition and an absence of clear Sector level leadership such a Peak Association.

While there is a vibrancy and dynamism in such a context, there is potential for inefficiencies, a confusing or opaque market, unclear entry points and a lack of representation. It is also unclear how sustainable the current Sector is as organisations compete for funding, managerial talent and member attention. Fragmentation and lack of representation also potentially hampers visibility of veteran needs, service coordination, and effective outreach and engagement by the ACT Government.

The ACT Government can play a strategic, catalytic or system leadership role which would see the Sector in the ACT mature and become more sustainable. Such a role would entail:

- Engaging with the Sector as a key partner in enhancing the wellbeing of ACT veterans and their families. This would involve engaging with the Sector through forums, working groups or taskforces on the parts of the ACT's Wellbeing Framework that are most relevant to veterans and their families.
- Supporting the Sector through targeted funding agreements and arrangements that would provide the Sector with a sustainable funding backbone that is tied to clear priority outcomes, while encouraging the Sector to continue to be entrepreneurial and innovative with other means of revenue generation. Possible funding models are discussed further in this submission.
- Supporting the Sector with preferential access and/or supportive lease arrangements to suitable properties as veteran service or local veteran community centers.
- Providing the sector with relevant ACT level data that would assist the Sector to offer services that are needed by ACT veteran and their families.
- Working with the Sector to create awareness of veteran related services.
- Encouraging the Sector to consider establishing a Peak Association in the ACT.

### **4. Establishing and leading a Veteran Wellbeing Network**

#### **The appeal of a wellbeing center**

The establishment of a wellbeing center in the ACT is an understandably attractive notion. A center,

(physical or blended) would be a tangible focal point in the community and its presence would signify commitment to veteran wellbeing.

While the ACT could have its own veteran wellbeing center, such a center would not be based on any urgent need or to address any specific market failure, as there is no evidence that we are able to uncover that would suggest any clear and pressing unmet needs amongst veterans and their families in the ACT.

However, this study is strongly of the view that such a center if desired, need not be established and managed by the ACT Government as there are already several viable local centers in the ACT including Soldier On, the RSL Woden Sub-Branch and the Veteran Support Centre in Page. Indeed, as a national organisation and one of the ACT's largest NGO providers of services to veterans and their families, including tele-services such as counselling and employment related services, it is possible that with funding support and a mandate, Solider On can readily act as the veteran wellbeing center for the ACT.

This would entail some sort of transparent engagement process, resulting in an MoU or agreement between the ACT Government and a local provider, which would include the need for the preferred provider to establish or strengthen services to meet any unmet needs, to establish tele-health services where required and to establish and maintain connections with other wellbeing centers nationally for the sharing of best practice, and especially for the purpose of warm handovers of veterans and family members who may be relocating to other jurisdictions from the ACT (or inbound veterans) whom require support.

Whilst there are veteran service providers based outside of the ACT who are well placed to provide wellbeing services, the introduction of a new provider to the ACT may increase tensions between providers and lead to further market fragmentation and confusion within the Sector. Designed this way, a potential ACT wellbeing center is an outsourced asset, shaped and governed by outcomes and performance standards set by the ACT Government as a condition of funding assistance.

However, a physical center does pose some challenges, including relatively large overheads including ongoing maintenance costs, workforce attraction and retention and service capacity issues and lack of scalability and agility especially in meeting surge or unexpected demands. A single wellbeing center operated by a single provider will also likely disenfranchise other service providers in the Sector and well as potentially limit choice for veterans and their families.

A single center is also potentially a single point of failure. Should a center or its service provider cease to operate suddenly for unforeseen reasons, it will be difficult for veterans to obtain services from alternative sources quickly.

While physical centers can and do provide benefit, this study is of the view that a single wellbeing center based model is unwarranted in the ACT context. There is no evidence that we have uncovered that would suggest that veteran wellbeing would be enhanced significantly by a single wellbeing center.

### **The importance of a wellbeing network**

An alternative model to support the wellbeing of veterans and their families is for the ACT Government to establish an ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network instead. This network would comprise eligible veteran service providers in the ACT as well as include selected national veteran service providers especially in areas where local capacity may be constrained or unable to meet emerging or surge demand, especially in the areas of tele-health for counselling, mental health support and psychology services.

A wellbeing Network would be enabled through:

- A single ACT veteran services digital gateway for veterans and their families to learn about and access veteran specific services from the ACT Government, DVA as well as from the Sector.

- An ACT Veterans Coordinator within the Community Services Directorate who maintains the gateway, coordinates the network and who facilitates the sharing of information and best practice. The ACT Veterans Coordinator also works with the Network in planning for capacity and capability development, as well as facilitating connections with other wellbeing centers across Australia. The ACT Veterans Coordinator is also responsible for qualifying or accrediting Network members to ensure quality of the Network.
- The Network would be governed by a Governance Committee converted from the current Ministerial Advisory Committee whose members are appointed by the responsible ACT Government minister. This Governance Committee would provide strategic direction and governance leadership to the Network. The ACT Veterans Coordinator would be an Ex-Officio member of the Governance Committee.
- Part funding of member organisations of the Network by the ACT Government through mechanisms discussed further in this submission,

An ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network seeks to harness, coordinate and optimise existing local service provider capacities in the ACT, complementing this with other national service provider capabilities where required, while providing Sector leadership in the absence of any Peak Authority or body.

An ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network avoids the risk of a single point of failure that may be present in the single wellbeing center model, as there will be more than just one provider in the Network. The Network will facilitate greater diversity and offer greater choice of services for veterans and their families. A Network is also potentially agile and scalable in responding to surge or emerging needs.

To prevent a highly fragmented, over populated or over serviced network and the inefficiencies that this will bring, organisational membership of such a network will need to be capped.

Entry into the Network could be managed through conventional Expression of Interest process (EOI) from the Sector based on a set of specifications and standards and network membership can be refreshed every few years in similar fashion to conventional ACT Government panel arrangements.

This Network can also be subject to other ACT Government procurement processes including the Secure Local Jobs requirement to ensure providers employ local staff where available.

## **5. Supporting and commissioning research into areas relevant for the wellbeing of veterans and their families in the ACT.**

The Interim Report provided a comprehensive summary of research centers across the country conducting veteran related research and their current areas of research focus. While this diverse body of ongoing research will likely relate to and be relevant to veterans in the ACT, there does not appear to be any research being conducted on issues to do specifically with ACT veterans.

The Interim Report also noted that there were a number of research gaps identified by the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare including housing and homelessness, social connections, education and training, employment and living standards and justice and safety. We also note that research could also be strengthened in the area of the Lived Experience of veterans. Lived Experience research will provide insight into the needs of veterans as they journey through their lifetimes and enable the provision of services that are relevant to various life stages or significant life events. These areas are opportunities for the ACT government to commission research that can be focused on both ACT veterans and their families and well as for veterans nationally.

This Report proposes that there is scope for the ACT Government to work in partnership with a single ACT based research center or a consortia to establish a National Centre of Excellence for Veteran Wellbeing Research and Practice. Such a center would focus on conducting lived experience research underpinned by the ACT government's Wellbeing Framework and provide expertise on evidence-based practices which enhance veteran wellbeing.

ACT based research centers which offer potential for center of excellence research partnerships with

the ACT Government include:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra
- Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing at the Australian National University
- Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University
- National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra

The 2020 survey of veterans and their families in the ACT (and surrounding regions) conducted as part of this Project, is a benchmark study of the needs of veterans and their families in the ACT. The ACT Government is well placed to continue to conduct this survey on a regular basis to keep track of needs and to provide the evidence for the provision of targeted services. Data from this survey should be made available to the ACT veteran services sector, to interested research institutions such as the AIHW and to the Department of Veteran Affairs for possible circulation to the Veteran Wellbeing Centers across Australia.

# Enhancing the awareness of health and social services amongst veterans and their families

In 2016–17, approximately 5,300 Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel departed from the ADF.<sup>7</sup> These veterans and their family transition from a healthcare system which is free and managed on their behalf, to a complex and at times hard to understand community healthcare system which includes public and private health services, primary healthcare, acute, chronic and aged care, in a variety of contexts.

Ensuring that veterans and their families have access to accurate, and tailored service information and healthcare options in a timely, practical, and consistent manner is important in mitigating the risk factors associated with military service. To build greater awareness of and access to health services, the following initiatives are proposed.

## 1. An ACT Veteran Gateway

The ACT veteran and family service and support environment is diverse, competitive, and somewhat opaque. This is to say that there are a large range of services and programs available to veterans through veteran organisations as well as through the community industry more broadly, the private sector and government.

It means that veterans and their families need to be well informed about the local and national market to be able to access appropriate services and to leverage the value that a competitive market potentially offers. Service providers including public health providers need to strengthen their reach, connection, networking, and promotion across the ACT veteran community.

The concept of an information and services gateway has been implemented within Australia by the Department of Social Services on behalf of carers. Launched in 2019, the Carer Gateway [www.carergateway.gov.au](http://www.carergateway.gov.au) is a national website which connects carers to information, online support services and programs. Through the online gateway carers can access;

- Support, advice, and information from local service providers.
- Real-time access to counselling, training, and carer resources.
- Real-life stories and case studies of the experiences and perspectives of carers.
- Tips and Q&As in relation to different caring circumstances and options.
- Referrals to government institutions for payments, programs and services.

The Gateway is administered by approved service providers based in the region which the carer is located. These providers are familiar with the local and regional service provider landscape and are funded to provide services to carers coming through the Gateway for a variety of services including counselling, training, referral, and information services. These services are delivered over the phone, online or via face-to-face.

The concept of a veterans' gateway has been realised in the United Kingdom. The UK Veterans' Gateway is the first point of contact for ex-serving personnel and their families looking for advice, support, services, programs and information across key areas from physical and mental health to employability, housing, finances, personal relationships and more.

There are several ways in which the ACT could progress the gateway concept, commissioning a specialist provider to build the Gateway as was the case with the Carer Gateway would be preferable and more feasible than the ACT Government undertaking the build in-house. The successful provider

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (AIHW) 2018 Veteran Profile

would engage the veteran community in the design and development phases to ensure the Gateway meets community needs and expectations and gets the necessary buy-in.

The rollout of an online Veteran Gateway would help to increase the veteran community's awareness of wellbeing services and potentially provide the ACT Government and the Sector with valuable feedback around veterans' wellbeing needs through key search words and the performance and take-up of services.

## **2. Service provider toolkit and competency training**

Both the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Veteran Mental Health (Council) and the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) recommend that clinical health service providers working with veterans undertake "more specific training and information in military service, trauma informed care and vulnerable populations"<sup>8</sup>.

Whilst it is not feasible or pragmatic to expect the entire ACT community health workforce become experts in the veteran experience, there is a consensus that the ACT's wellbeing workforce should at least be equipped with the knowledge on where to go to access the necessary tools and information that will enable them to deliver appropriate services. This is particularly relevant during periods when there is significant pressure and stress on serving and veteran communities such is the case with the release of the Brereton Report in 2020.

There are opportunities for the ACT Government to commission the development of an online information and resource toolkit for its health workforce to provide information in relation to the nature of military service and the protective and risk factors associated with service, the veterans lived experience and wellbeing needs.

The information toolkit could include an array of video content such as short interviews with current and ex-serving personnel, their families, the latest research into veteran health and wellbeing, profiles on local VSOs and ESOs etc. The toolkit could refer to the various opportunities for clinicians and medical practitioners to develop deeper understanding and competencies around working with veterans including through their professional governing bodies.

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<sup>8</sup> The mental health of veterans and defence force service members Positional Statement 99 <https://www.ranzcp.org/news-policy/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements/the-mental-health-of-veterans-and-defence-force-se>

# Investing in the ACT's healthcare workforce and infrastructure

Having access to health and wellbeing services where and when people need them is an important protective factor and a key social determinate of wellbeing.

Whilst veterans are generally happy with the ease of access and the range of services available to them, some assistance particularly in the area of access is required. The recommended approach to improving veterans' access to healthcare is to prioritise access to healthcare at the whole of community level. This involves the ACT Government's continued investment in the healthcare workforce, health services and health infrastructure.

## 1. Clear referral pathways and processes.

In such a vibrant and fragmented market, it can be challenging for both public and private service provider providers to stay abreast of new and existing veteran services. This is often because:

- The personal details of the veteran cannot easily be shared with other providers.
- The rapid trialling and rollout of services and the growing number of services being delivered online often by inter-state based or national organisation means information can change day-to-day or there is a delay until information can be circulated.
- A general reluctance by some veteran service providers to refer veterans to other organisations.
- Service providers have different areas of expertise and may not pay attention to developments outside their fields of interest or expertise.

The ultimate objective is to provide continuity of care and to ensure that veterans' health care usage remains interconnected and consistent with their health needs and preferences.

The ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network will bring much needed focus and cohesion in the provision of veterans' wellbeing services and whilst the number of providers on the Network will be capped, for the Network to operate effectively there needs to be a clear set of operating guidelines and standards particularly when it comes to referring veterans and their families between Network members and between Network and non-Network providers.

The Network should be governed by clear and consistent standards around intake, servicing, referring, and discharging to ensure seamless holistic care. This could include involve:

- Aligning and harmonising some data collection and information sharing across Network members.
- The introduction of a holistic veteran wellbeing plan that is adopted by all Network members.
- The creation of linkages and MOUs between Network members and other service providers including the community health system.

Establishing an agreed set of principles and values which underpins the Network and governs how Network members interact and partner with each other will benefit veterans and help to ensure less veterans fall through service cracks.

## 2. Continued investment in health infrastructure and services.

Demand for health care in the ACT has been growing rapidly in recent years. With the share of Canberra's population aged 65 and over expected to rise from 13 per cent in 2018 to 15 per cent of the total population in the next 10 years and average health expenditure for people in this age group being four times higher than that of people under 65, continued attention and investment in health infrastructure is warranted<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> ACT Infrastructure Plan 2019 [https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1432449/act-infrastructure-plan.pdf](https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1432449/act-infrastructure-plan.pdf) (Accessed 30 November) page 29



The ACT Government's investment in healthcare infrastructure currently represents 20 per cent of the ACT's total budgeted infrastructure investment and almost one-third of the ACT's annual budget is allocated to delivering healthcare services<sup>10</sup>. Veterans, like other members of the ACT community, will undoubtedly benefit from the ACT Government's investment in healthcare infrastructure including The Canberra Hospital SPIRE project as well from increased healthcare funding to support services such as the nurse-led walk-in centres.

In addition to continued investment in health infrastructure and services, maintaining a focus on supporting Canberrans to be healthier throughout their lives through general health awareness and prevention campaigns and initiatives will help ensure veterans enjoy better health as they age.

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<sup>10</sup> ACT Infrastructure Plan 2019 [https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1432449/act-infrastructure-plan.pdf](https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1432449/act-infrastructure-plan.pdf) (Accessed 30 November) page 29

# Mainstream tele-health services for veterans and complement this with a veteran specific tele-health service that has access to national capabilities

The 2020 ACT Region Veteran Community Service Needs and Awareness survey revealed no clear need for tele-health services above and beyond what was currently being provided through ACT Health, and community and private service providers including local veteran service providers.

Despite a self-reported willingness to interact online, the majority of respondents viewed tele-health as lower quality compared to traditional face-to-face delivery. There was also the sense that tele-health services were not appropriate for the needs of veterans with complex and sensitive issues.

Whilst there is a growing trend towards tele-health delivery models based on a growing amount of research on the efficacy and effectiveness of telehealth across healthcare practice and medical disciplines, tele-health is not always an appropriate mechanism for healthcare delivery. Individual client preferences and clinical and/or health imperatives including contraindications form an important part of the decision-making when considering the efficacy, cost-effectiveness and appropriateness of tele-health.

Based on our findings we suggest two main complementary strategies available to the ACT Government in relation to the provision of tele-health services on behalf of the veteran community:

## 1. Mainstreaming of tele-health services for veterans

ACT Health's Central Health Intake and Digital Solutions Support team together administer and manage the ACT Community's access to tele-health services across mental health, alcohol and other drug, cancer, dental, community and outpatient services.

In May 2020, the ACT Government allocated \$1.7 million to support a range of non-government organisations (NGOs) in the health sector respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19. This included \$200k to the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services, and relevant NGOs to support individuals and families access telehealth services.

Continuing to invest in the ACT Government's tele-health network including developing the clinical and non-clinical workforce's understanding of the protective and risk factors associated with military service, the veterans' lived experience and their wellbeing needs will make a significant contribution to strengthening the environment of wellbeing in the ACT. It also acknowledges the risks in the provision of on-demand tele-health services for veterans and their families which includes fragmented care if veterans are seeing multi-providers and increased risk of duplication.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Outsourcing the provision of tele-health for veterans

Should however, the ACT Government wish to pursue a tele-health service for veterans and their families we would recommend that tele-health services be deployed discretely for relatively simple services, to complement face to face interactions or to help with surges in demand.

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11 <https://www.racgp.org.au/advocacy/position-statements/view-all-position-statements/health-systems-and-environmental/on-demand-telehealth-services>

The most straight forward approach would be to directly source a local provider and to establish an MOU or enter into an Agreement to provide specific tele-health services to the ACT veteran community. The ACT Government could enter into an agreement with a national VSO such as Solider On for example given it's headquarter presence in Canberra and that it has the potential infrastructure, workforce and experience in tele-health services.

We suggest that the goal of strengthening and maturing the Veteran Services Sector does require a provider with local knowledge, experiences, and a strong reputation for delivering quality veteran services. Whilst there are several highly experienced national providers such as Mates4Mates for example, the introduction of another service provider into an already crowded and fragmented local market may result in other consequences for the Sector. Over time as the service takes hold and matures, there is scope for the successful tele-health provider(s) to scale up and grow the tele-health service to connect with DVA's national network of veteran wellbeing centres.

In engaging a service provider to deliver specific tele-health services, the ACT Government would need to factor in the following specific and general requirements into the Agreement or MOU.

The successful service provider would need to demonstrate;

- Experience in the design and delivery of services for veterans and their families including an understanding of the nature of military service, the protective and risk factors associated with military service and the veteran lived experience.
- Experience in delivering tele-health services in Australia.
- Strong governance and service management and coordination processes including a dedicated and appropriately skilled leadership and management team including;
  - A Telehealth Coordinator to provide leadership, coordination and service development of telehealth services. This position would be responsible for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on telehealth activity, issues and risks across the service.
  - Appropriate administrative and technical support in planning and supervising all services including maintaining and updating health records.
- Current workforce bench strength or the capacity to scale up quickly according to the need. Furthermore, the provider will need to stipulate how they train and development their staff and volunteers and stay attuned to leading practice.

# Stronger Sector Coordination

There is a keen desire for stronger coordination and collaboration in the Sector. In the context of limited financial, material, and human resources, ACT veteran service providers need to share information and knowledge, collaborate in the pursuit of wellbeing outcomes, and coordinate their efforts and initiatives.

Better coordination at a Sector level will result in:

- Less service duplication, and enhanced visibility around provider expertise and capacity.
- Increased efficiencies by reducing overlaps, resources spent on them and separate admin processes.
- More opportunities for quality dialogue and debate around veteran policy / service delivery needs.

## 1. ACT Veteran Community Coordinator

The responsibility for leading collaboration within the Sector as well as with nurturing collaborative capacities, capabilities and mindsets lies in the appointment of an ACT Veteran Coordinator who would sit within the Office of Seniors & Veterans in the ACT Community Services Directorate. In addition to maintaining the Veteran Gateway, the ACT Veterans Coordinator would:

- Qualify or accredit ACT Wellbeing Network members.
- Lead strategic workforce planning and capability needs analysis projects.
- Coordinate budget bids, fundraising activities, and joint grant applications on behalf of the Sector.
- Identify and develop the paid and volunteer workforces through education, training and professional development initiatives.
- Build alliances, establish, and maintain MOUs and initiate collaborative service projects between ESOs.
- Facilitate connections with other wellbeing centers across Australia, particular in support of veterans moving inter-state.
- Develop an accreditation model and streamline existing accreditation processes to improve resource utilisation, quality, and safety etc.
- Circulate publications and research papers and commission research projects.
- Managing specific projects including the Veteran Gateway project.
- Monitoring compliance, standards, and insurances of veteran service providers.
- Undertake data collection and reporting including tracking emerging needs, and service delivery through the coordination every few years of the ACT Region Veteran Community Service Needs and Awareness survey.

## 2. Improved veteran data collection and coordination

There are opportunities for the ACT Government to collect, coordinate and share ACT veteran wellbeing data with other service providers, state and territory agencies and national institutions to help to build a better understanding of the key determinants of veteran wellbeing.

The 2020 survey of veterans and their families in the ACT (and surrounding regions) and subsequent surveys should be made available to the ACT veteran services sector, to interested research institutions such as the Australian Institute for Health & Welfare's Data Integration Authority and to the Department of Veteran Affairs for possible circulation to the various Wellbeing Centers across Australia. Sharing this survey data will enable DVA and its partners to track the wellbeing of the veteran population in a manner not previously available. It should also be provided to the ACT

Wellbeing Framework coordination team which sits within the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate.

### **3. Establishment of a Governance Committee**

The Veteran Wellbeing Network will require a dedicated Governance Committee.

The ACT Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families, which is currently made up of individuals with a broad range of knowledge, skills, qualifications and lived experience, is an appropriate and suitably equipped body to provide governance leadership and strategic guidance on the establishment of an ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network.

The Advisory Committee, working closely with the ACT Veteran Coordinator would be responsible for:

- Setting the strategic direction and providing governance leadership for the Network.
- Assisting in the administration of the Capacity Building & Sustainability Support Fund on behalf of ACT Veteran Network members including providing recommendations to the ACT Minister on funding recipients and allocations.
- Commissioning and coordinating data collection on the ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network including working with the ACT Wellbeing Framework Coordination Unit.
- Identifying and implementing policy settings, service innovations and better-practice service delivery for the ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network.

Following discussions with the Council Chair, the Office of Seniors and Veterans could look to amend the Council's functions and terms of reference. Advisory Committee members would continue to be appointed by the ACT Minister for Families & Communities. The ACT Veterans Coordinator would be an Ex-Officio member of the Advisory Committee.

# Sustainable Funding Arrangements

Funding is a primary role for any government and there are opportunities for the ACT Government to initiate a variety of funding models in order to successfully rollout the ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network, ACT Veteran Gateway, and ACT Veteran Coordinator. Whatever approach is adopted it is clear that funding will be critical to the roll-out of the majority of initiatives recommended in the report.

## 1. An Industry levy

The post-pandemic economic recovery will undoubtedly impact upon ACT Government agencies including the ACT Community Service Directorate over the coming years and beyond. Whilst there is potential for decreased operating budgets and constraints on staff recruitment, it is recommended that a specific budget bid for a Veteran Coordinator position be considered by the Office of Seniors & Veterans.

In relation to the establishment of an ACT Veteran Gateway the ACT Government may wish to consider imposing an industry levy, or adopt a subscriber pays funding model. The ACT Community Services Industry Workforce Strategy and its implementation has been funded through a levy upon organisations in receipt of ACT Government funds. The levy equates to a percentage of total ACT Government funding received by the community organisation.

To establish an ACT Veteran Gateway, the ACT Government could impose an annual co-contribution levy on all VSOs in the ACT. The levy amount could be a percentage of their annual income, or a percentage of the Government funding they receive. Alternatively, it could be based on their clients, service span/reach etc. As an incentive to participate, service organisations would have their information uploaded on the Gateway.

## 2. A Capacity Building and Sustainability Support Fund

Supporting the Sector through targeted funding agreements and arrangements will provide a sustainable funding backbone for the Sector as well as will ensure ongoing focus is tied to clear wellbeing outcomes.

The concept of a Capacity Building and Sustainability Support Fund has been adapted from the ACT Diversification & Sustainability Support Fund for Canberra Clubs which was established by the Justice & Community Safety Directorate following a 2018 review into options to support ACT Clubs to reduce their reliance on gaming machine authorisations and to become more sustainable businesses. The establishment of a club diversification support fund was just one of several initiatives recommended including capacity building measures to improve the ability of clubs to plan and execute diversification strategies; and other ACT Government support measures.

The purpose of the Capacity Building & Sustainability Support Fund would be to assist ACT Veteran Wellbeing Network members,

- To strengthen the efficacy and sustainability of their veteran support services.
- To grow the scope and nature of their wellbeing services to meet demand.
- To collaborate with other service providers in pursuit of similar wellbeing outcomes.
- To undertake training and skills development for their staff including volunteers, executives and management committees and boards.

All applications for payments out of the Fund would be considered by an independent advisory board, who provide advice and recommendations about payments from the Fund to the Assistant Minister for Families and Community. Suggested principles or assumptions governing the funding pool may include:

- Applicants must be an approved provider on the ACT's Veteran Wellbeing Network to be eligible for funding.
- Applicants must clearly demonstrate that the intended outcomes of their activity/initiative will achieve one or more of the purposes of the Fund.
- Applicants will be required to outline the project, providing any research or data underpinning the project as well as a data collection and reporting framework to monitor and evaluate actual outcomes against intended outcomes.
- An independent Advisory Board would be established for the sole purposes of reviewing grant applications and making recommendations to the ACT Minister for Veterans. This Board would be separate to the Ministerial Advisory Council however members may sit on both.
- The application must be for matching funds and the successful organisation must acquit the funds within 12 months of receiving the money.