

# Caring for diverse populations

A resource for GPs supporting veterans



## Executive Summary

This resource provides practical guidance for GPs to deliver trauma-informed, inclusive and person-centred care to veterans who have served in the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

## Resource inclusions

- Veteran-specific administration (DVA cards, billing rules, referrals)
- Referrals to veteran support services (Open Arms, Mates4Mates, Soldier On, Legacy Australia, RSL)

## Key objectives of this guide

- Supports GPs in engaging veterans with sensitivity and respect, recognising military culture and potential trauma
- Complements care planning and communication with other providers, even though veterans do not require a Mental Health Treatment Plan (MHTP) for funded mental health care

## Core principles

- **Trauma-informed care (TIC):** Emphasise safety, trust, empowerment, collaboration and peer support
- **Veteran-centric approach:** Avoid assumptions about trauma or PTSD; validate strengths and autonomy
- **Address stigma:** Use supportive, non-clinical language
- **Confidentiality:** Explain limits clearly to build trust
- **Choice and control:** Offer care options and respect boundaries

## Practical guidance

- **Introductions and rapport building:** Discuss confidentiality, pronouns, and preferred name; explain mental health care options (Open Arms, DVA-funded services)
- **Exploring veteran experiences:** Offer the choice to share service history, deployments, and transition challenges
- **Physical and emotional health:** Assess pain, sleep, eating habits, energy, and emotional wellbeing; screen for PTSD symptoms
- **Safety and suicide risk assessment:** Conduct culturally safe risk assessments for harm from others and self-harm; use sensitive language
- **Trauma disclosure:** Ask about symptoms, not details; avoid re-traumatisation
- **Strengths and support networks:** Identify coping strategies, community ties and peer supports (eg ex-service organisations)
- **Future care planning:** Collaborate on goals, lifestyle changes and preferred support options

## Clinical context

- Ex-serving males are 26% more likely to die by suicide than all Australian males; ex-serving females are twice as likely as all Australian females. PTSD affects 9.1% of veterans, with 51.4% meeting criteria for complex PTSD.