



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

MEDIA RELEASE

18 October 2020

ARMS WIDE OPEN TO MORE VETERANS TWO YEARS ON

TOMORROW, 19 October, marks two years since Australia's leading provider of high quality mental health support services for veterans and their families was renamed Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said the *Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service* was first established by our Vietnam veterans in 1982 who recognised a need for specialist support.

"Over the years this service has evolved and improved to provide vital services to more people in the serving and ex-serving communities, and it was two years ago that our Vietnam veterans graciously allowed us to rename this vital and life-saving service to be more inclusive of who can access it," Mr Chester said.

"Open Arms is one of our Vietnam veterans' most important legacies and now benefits all veterans and their families, which is something I know they are incredibly proud of.

"The service has grown to support some 30,000 clients in 2019-20, a 50 per cent increase from two years ago and illustrates that more veterans and their families are speaking up and seeking the support they need.

"Open Arms is available 24/7, 365 days a year on 1800 011 046 and I encourage veterans and their families who may be struggling to call at any time if they need support, day or night."

Open Arms is led by Psychologist and Army veteran, Dr Stephanie Hodson, who said she was immensely proud of how Open Arms has grown and been accepted by Australia's veteran community.

"The stigma around mental health is real, and it is very encouraging that more and more of our military veterans and their families are reaching out to Open Arms for support," Dr Hodson said.

"2020 has been difficult for all Australians, including veterans and their families, and Open Arms stands ready to support our current and ex-service community through this challenging time.

"It is really encouraging that people are reaching out for support when they need it, we are just a phone call away."

The Government provided an additional \$5 million in funding in the 2020 Budget to further expand services in rural and regional Australia, as part of an over \$100 million investment in mental health and employment support for the veteran community.

Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au

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Editor's note: To request an interview with Minister Chester or Dr Hodson, on the support available to veterans and their families via Open Arms, please contact the numbers listed below.

MEDIA CONTACTS:
Rachel Tharratt: 02 6277 7820
DVA Media: 02 6289 6466

Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Canberra ACT.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OPEN ARMS

Open Arms offers:

- 24/7 counselling support through a dedicated support line – 1800 011 046
- Face-to-face and video counselling for individuals, couples and families
- Care coordination for clients with multiple and/or complex needs
- Peer support and veteran community engagement by those with lived experience of Defence service and mental health recovery, as either a veteran or family member
- Online and face-to-face group treatment programs to develop skills and enhance support for individuals and couples
- Suicide prevention and intervention workshops and online training
- Mental health training programs
- Crisis accommodation support – especially where there are concerns of domestic violence or homelessness
- Referrals to other services or specialist treatment programs, as needed
- Information, education and self-help resources are on the [Open Arms website](http://www.openarms.gov.au).

Open Arms is also the host of an anonymous 24/7 support line – Safe Zone Support – which was created to help vulnerable cohorts of veterans and their families who might not otherwise seek mental health support due to concerns about protecting their identity – including those in the Special Forces. Safe Zone Support's specialist counsellors can offer help to veterans and their families without needing to know who they are. Calls to 1800 142 072 are answered 24/7, and are not recorded. For more Information visit: <https://www.openarms.gov.au/safe-zone-support>

Open Arms is available to all current and ex-serving members and their families, is available 24/7 by calling 1800 011 046. The service is free and confidential and there is always a team member, who understands the military experience, available to answer your call.