



## The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel

### MEDIA RELEASE

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#### NATIONAL NETWORK OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS

AUSTRALIANS who support veterans and their families are being trained as 'Mental Health First Aiders' through free training offered by Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling and ex-service organisations around the country.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said Mental Health First Aid and suicide prevention training offers veterans, and the people who support them, an opportunity to 'square away' their own mental health so they can take care of themselves and those around them.

Whether it's packing your kit or sorting yourself and gear in other ways, 'squared away' is a military concept where once you have yourself sorted, you are then able to help those around you.

"It's not too dissimilar with mental health and I am encouraged that more than 1400 members of the veteran community have participated in mental health and suicide prevention training in the last 12 months," Mr Chester said.

"Family members, friends and colleagues are often the first to notice subtle changes in someone's behaviour and training in Mental Health First Aid or suicide intervention equips them with the skills and confidence to identify signs, start a conversation and encourage them to seek professional help.

"This training, initiated by the Returned and Services League (RSL), is now being delivered in partnership with ex-services organisations across Australia, highlighting the great outcomes we can achieve by working together.

"I would encourage anyone in the ex-service community to become a Mental Health First Aider and join our national network by contacting Open Arms and participating in the training.

"The recent Budget provided an additional \$101.7 million to further increase mental health support services for our veterans and their families, further demonstrating our commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of our veteran community."

In addition to Mental Health First Aid, Open Arms provides suicide prevention training including the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Suicide alertness for everyone (safeTALK), and Suicide Prevention Start, a 60-90 minute self-paced online workshop.

Former Warrant Officer of the Air Force, and now a National Director in Open Arms, Rob Swanwick, said Open Arms is proud to provide training that can save lives.

“In the same way we are trained in physical first aid, we want to upskill people in mental health first aid. There’s a great sense of camaraderie and mutual support in the veteran community that comes from shared experiences, and being able to strengthen the ethos of covering each other’s back is incredibly important and rewarding,” Mr Swanwick said.

“It reminds me that as a Loadmaster, I gave the brief hundreds of times, and we all know it well; in an emergency, get your own oxygen on and look after yourself first so you can better assist others around you.”

In addition to providing free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families, Open Arms offers a variety of free training opportunities to those seeking to help family, friends, co-workers or others in the veteran community: [Suicide intervention and mental health literacy workshops](#). To find out more call 1800 011 046 or visit [openarms.gov.au](http://openarms.gov.au)

**ENDS**

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