



SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE

Earlier this year I gave evidence during the final hearing block of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. For three years, the Royal Commission has heard evidence from serving and former-serving members, and their families. The Royal Commission has examined extensive data and sought expert testimony.

The Royal Commission has noted that for most Soldiers¹, service in our Army is a positive aspect of their personal and professional lives. This is an important point to acknowledge but that is not what this Royal Commission is about.

It is about those for whom service has been a negative experience, the effects of which have been life-long, life-altering and in the worst case life-ending. The Royal Commission has heard of many such experiences, historic and recent. Our failings – whether institutional or individual – have had terrible consequences for those we have failed.

The evidence is compelling. Since 2017, for example, we know we have lost 30 serving Soldiers either suspected or confirmed to have died by suicide². Many more have been lost across our wider community.

This is not acceptable. We must do more. These are **our** people, members of our teams and our Army. To fight and win in war our teams must be built on the foundations of trust, respect, and cohesion.

Last year we identified and brought home the remains of Australian soldiers who were killed in the battle of Fromelles in 1916. This reminds us all that '*Lest we Forget*' is not rhetoric, it is a **promise**. We continued the search for our soldiers for over a century, a commitment of which we ought to be proud.

Now is the time to apply the same approach and effort to the challenge of suicide and suicidality among our people. We will not leave our mates behind, fallen on their own personal battlefield.

This Royal Commission presents us with a once in a generation opportunity to reduce the incidence of suicide and suicidality in our community. To make a **step change** rather than incremental improvement. It is both our individual and collective obligation to do so.

I am ultimately accountable for Army's people, culture, mission and resources, but like everything we do – it requires a committed team effort if we are to be successful.

¹ 'Soldier' – refers to all whom have worn and wear our uniform today, regardless of rank.

² This figure is according to statistics compiled for the Defence suicide database. While I acknowledge that this number does not represent the entirety with a connection to Army who are either suspected or confirmed to have died by suicide, this number does provide a sobering reminder of the impact that suicide and suicidality have had, and continue to have, on those who serve in our Army and their families.

We need not wait for the Royal Commission to publish its findings and recommendations before we act. The opportunity exists today, and we must act on it today.

We will focus on three outcomes: achieving a **measurable** reduction in the incidence of suicide and suicidality amongst Soldiers; building our individual and collective resilience; and strengthening our culture³. When we achieve this, we will have a stronger Army, an Army that is more capable and better able to fulfil its mission.

We must move on this effort together, as one team, and we must stay together. We train and fight in teams. Trust among our teams is our **main effort**.

I am grateful for all that you and your families do in service each day. I am proud to serve in an Army that owns its failures; an Army that is genuinely determined to learn from the past and committed to improving our future.

Our Army's future begins today – with each of us reflecting our values in our thoughts, words and actions today and every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Stuart', with a small '4' written at the end of the signature.

Simon Stuart, AO, DSC
Lieutenant General
Chief of Army

16 . July 2024

³ 'Culture' – our culture is how well we translate our values into what we think, say and do every day.