



Veteran Employment – Summary of activities August – December 2022

Background

In the lead up to the Australian Government's Jobs and Skills Summit (Summit) held 1 – 2 September 2022, a series of Roundtable meetings occurred to inform discussion at the Summit and the subsequent Employment White Paper.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, the Hon Matt Keogh MP, convened two Veteran Employment Roundtable meetings (Roundtables) as part of this process. The Roundtables, in Melbourne on 22 August 2022 and Perth on 29 August 2022, brought together representatives from peak industry associations, employment service providers, ex-service organisations and employers, inclusive of small, medium and large businesses. The discussions focussed on boosting recognition of skills and experience for veterans and families, enablers and barriers to meaningful employment, and populations who may require additional assistance. A number of representatives provided perspectives from lived experience. A list of organisations represented is at **Attachment A**.

This document reflects discussions and learnings from the Roundtables and information relating to veteran employment that has been released subsequent to the Roundtables and Jobs and Skills Summit. In addition, it outlines actions progressed to support veteran employment.

Why focus on Veteran Employment?

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is recognised for the significant investment, through training and education, in its workforce - serving ADF members. With around 6,500 members transitioning from active service to civilian life each year, it is in the national interest to ensure this investment continues to contribute to the broader community, through civilian employment or meaningful engagement with the community, when an individual leaves the ADF.

The majority of veterans transition successfully to civilian employment, and often have employment outcomes favourable to the general Australian population¹. The Australian Government acknowledges that some veterans experience challenges when seeking employment² and that there remain groups within the transitioning veteran population at greater risk of underemployment or unemployment³.

Employment contributes as a protective factor for an individual's wellbeing; and unemployment or underemployment as a risk factor. This is reflected in the DVA Wellbeing Model, with employment recognised as a domain of wellbeing, along with factors such as income and finance, housing and social support and connection⁴. More broadly, employment and a well-functioning labour market support the economy and underpin productivity growth and social wellbeing.⁵

¹ *A profile of Australia's veterans, 2018* (p 30 – 32) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census - [Service with the Australian Defence Force: Census](#); *Understanding the wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving ADF members*, AIHW 2022

² *Making the move: Veterans transitioning to a civilian workplace*, Becker, McCormack, Abell & Smidt, 2021); *Obtaining and retaining employment post military service: A qualitative analysis of challenges experienced by Australian veterans*, Romaniuk, Kidd, Banfield & Batterham, 2022

³ *Understanding the wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving ADF members*, AIHW 2022

⁴ DVA Corporate Plan 2022-23

⁵ 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit issues paper, [treasury.gov.au](https://www.treasury.gov.au); Interim report No. 6 – 5-year Productivity Inquiry: A more productive labour market, Productivity Commission, 2022.

Research has also highlighted the specific importance of employment to the veteran community. Reasons for this include the negative impact of military service on employment for Australian World War II and Vietnam veterans⁶, and the ongoing focus of the impacts of physical and mental health on employment of veterans⁷.

Lastly, for employers who are motivated to engage veterans, barriers still remain, with these barriers greater for industries and employers who are less familiar with military service⁸.

For these reasons, it is in the interests of the individual, their family and the broader community that veterans are supported to effectively transition to, and thrive in, civilian employment.

What we heard at the Roundtables

Chaired by Minister Keogh, participants of both Roundtables were asked to consider areas of specific relevance to veteran employment, as they related to one or more of the focus areas of the Jobs and Skills Summit:

- maintaining full employment and growing productivity
- boosting job security and wages
- lifting participation and reducing barriers to employment
- delivering a high-quality labour force through skills, training and migration
- maximising opportunities in the industries of the future.

Participants reflected on how issues applied across different veteran cohorts; the challenges and opportunities for veterans, family members and employers and how improved navigation and connectivity between services, future employees and employers might occur, without loss of individualised and localised responses.

Across both Roundtables, participants noted:

- The Australian Government's significant investment in serving members of the ADF, with their attributes and skills a sovereign capability that should be fully recognised by employers and utilised after their separation from full time service.
- While known data relating to veteran (and partner/spouse) employment demonstrates relatively positive employment outcomes, specific challenges and areas of need exist.
- Veteran employment intersects with issues of diversity/inclusion; disability; skills and training; gender equity; family; and mature age workers for employers.
- There is a need to consider issues through the different lenses of employer, veteran or partner.
- There is a tendency to view military families through a lens of 'service and sacrifice', positioning family members in a role of primarily supporting the serving member, which can diminish the importance of retaining their own community connection, participation in the labour market, job satisfaction, and financial stability for the broader family unit.
- There is value in engaging with a mature age workforce, particularly as veterans may have retired earlier than the general population and are considering re-entering the workforce.

⁶ Cousely et al, 2017 and Siminiski 2013, cited in *A profile of Australia's veterans, 2018* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

⁷ *A systematic review of the veteran employment research*, DVA and University of the Sunshine Coast, August 2022

⁸ *Making the move: Veterans transitioning to a civilian workplace*, Becker, McCormack, Abell & Smidt, 2021); *Obtaining and retaining employment post military service: A qualitative analysis of challenges experienced by Australian veterans*, Romaniuk, Kidd, Banfield & Batterham, 2022

Participant discussion at the Roundtables also highlighted:

Employment Pathways & Options:

- Veterans need to better understand (through improved awareness of, or access to, existing services and/or education) the career pathway options available to them, both during service, on transition and over time after ADF service, and how they can best apply and translate their skills and attributes to these.
- There is a need for individualised support to assist veterans who are most at risk or have the most employment needs (and for employers to retain veterans), to ensure the expectations of individuals can be managed (often around income parity) and a 'whole of person' approach can be provided.
- Underemployment of partners/family members in terms of labour market participation (hours) and/or not being employed at levels commensurate with their capability or qualifications, due to the impacts of a military lifestyle, needs consideration. While remote work is now easier to access for some roles, this does not apply for all professions. This is identified as a gender equity issue with the majority of ADF partners/spouses being female.
- While employers report relative ease in recruiting veterans with professional skills, as they often have a direct synergy with roles in the civilian setting, there is a need for capability mapping across the scope of civilian positions they offer for veterans who were more operationally focussed during service. New career pathways may be identified through this work.
- Larger companies or networked employers may have greater capacity to support continued employment for veterans and/or family members who face relocation.
- An increase in the range of employment services and support available to veterans, partners and families over the last few years has occurred. While this has created improved access for many, awareness of and navigating which service or support may best suit an individual or an employer's needs can be problematic. An unintended consequence of increased competition for finite resourcing was noted, with formal collaboration between organisations provided an example of an opportunity for funding bodies to encourage.

Skills and training:

- With skills gaps experienced between some ADF qualifications and those of civilian requirements, there is a need to continue to find ways to mitigate these prior to separation from the ADF, and as part of the transition process.
- Some options to address skills gaps include recognition of prior learning, internships and apprenticeships, particularly for mature age workers (with incentives); mobility of registrations/qualifications (particularly for partner employment) and employer-supported training.
- The causes for under-utilisation of some existing skills and training programs were queried due to veterans being focused on other priorities in advance of transition; not identifying a need for additional support and/or the communication channels and methods used to promote these services. Personal networks and word of mouth were viewed as the most effective communication channels.

Attraction and recruitment processes:

- Traditional recruitment processes, where applications are made online and/or may not be acknowledged nor feedback provided can prove frustrating for veterans, who are moving from a culture of trusted networks and where all information is acknowledged. An expectation of income parity with what was earned in the ADF (inclusive of allowances on top of the base salary) when first transitioning can also place veterans in a position of seeking roles that require more experience than they can demonstrate at the time.

- Perceptions of employers around ADF family members being ‘job hoppers’ and the ability to retain an employee for longer than a posting cycle, in addition to the possible requirements for flexible hours of an ADF family employee, are some of the barriers to partner recruitment.
- Despite a range of support being available, some veterans are still not effectively identifying and translating their skill sets when applying for roles, or at interview.
- Systemic and traditional recruitment processes used by employers, that focus heavily on work experience and demonstrated skills, are seen as detrimental to veteran recruitment. There is a need to capture attributes required for a role, map existing capabilities to positions, and focus on the ability to acquire skills or fill skills gaps in a relatively short period of time as part of recruitment processes.
- Where employers see the value proposition of veteran employment, many have attempted to address these issues by undertaking capability mapping, providing warm handovers or information sessions and/or amending their recruitment processes.

Culture, Diversity and Retention:

- Organisations that understand military culture and lifestyle can be attractive to the veteran community, with this also supporting employee retention.
- Understanding the military culture that employees have been immersed in, and providing (or creating) a different, but equally meaningful community and sense of purpose in the workplace is seen as integral to supporting staff to thrive.
- Education and support is required for employers who are unfamiliar with military service to better understand the translation of skills and attributes to the workplace and how to constructively integrate and support veteran community culture.
- While there are known actions that support veteran employment, such as mentoring, there is also a need to ensure these processes are positive and constructive for the individuals involved.

Disability:

- A proportion of veterans seeking employment after service experience physical and/or mental health impacts that range from acute to chronic issues. There is a need for early intervention, as this can result in employment-seeking sometimes being delayed for some years while an individual manages their health and rehabilitation which can, in turn, compound negative employment outcomes, and wider wellbeing outcomes.
- Partners, who may prioritise support of their partner over their own career, must also be considered.

The summary above reflects discussion across both Roundtables. Information from both Roundtables was provided to the Treasury Jobs and Skills Summit working group following each meeting.

Veteran employment - what we now know

Prior to 2021 robust data on veteran employment was limited, and only a small number of research projects had been undertaken within Australia specifically focusing on veteran employment issues. Whilst some claims had been made with regard to the Australian veteran unemployment rate, this was not considered reliable. Efforts to understand the data and methodology used were not successful and it is considered the information may have included population groups excluded from the general population unemployment rate.

In its report *A profile of Australia's veterans 2018*, (p 30-32), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) cited employment related data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014-15 National Health Survey, and from the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Study*. The latter was one of a number of studies undertaken as part of the Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme, a comprehensive study undertaken in 2015 by a consortium of six institutions to examine the impact of military service on the mental, physical and social health of serving and ex-Serving ADF members and their families. A Key Findings Report, published in 2019, consolidated and summarised the three inter-related studies and included the employment outcomes of ADF members discharged between 2010 and 2014. This included those engaged in work or meaningful activity, those unemployed and seeking work, or unemployed and unable to work. The report also identified the most commonly reported employing industries of transitioned ADF members, the most common self-reported reasons for leaving the ADF, and of these, the type of discharge. Both reports identified trends of favourable employment outcomes for the majority of transitioning veterans, but that some groups were at risk of unemployment.

Since this time other research on veteran employment has been undertaken, however this has generally been qualitative research with smaller population cohorts.

Veteran Employment Data - Australian Census

On 10 August 2021, for the first time the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census included a question on service in the ADF: 'Has the person ever served in the Australian Defence Force?' The question also asked whether the respondent had served in the regular and/or reserve services and whether the person has current or previous service.

Two releases of data from the 2021 Census have now occurred, with a third release due in mid-2023. In relation to the ADF service question, two ABS analytical articles have also been published following each data release, providing more in-depth insights to a range of topics, including employment. The most recent analytical article was published 31 October 2022⁹.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has a strategic partnership with DVA, with recent data integration projects enabling Department of Defence personnel data to be combined with data held at the ABS from the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP) data asset, without the need to share personal identifying information between each organisation.

On 1 September 2022, the report *Understanding the wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members* was released. This report describes the wellbeing status of ex-serving ADF members and their family members during 2016, across the wellbeing domains of employment, income and finance, education and skills, housing, and social support, providing a baseline report to use now – and to compare with more comprehensive analysis into the future.

The report provides separate and complementary information to that available from the ABS 2021 Census. The Census provides self-reported data, covers different questions, and provides information that is specific to those people present in a household on Census night.

Key insights from the 2021 ABS Census, include:

- Over half (53 per cent) of those who previously served were aged 65 years or more – that is, over retirement age (noting that most ADF personnel are eligible to retire before the general population pension ages of 65-67).
- Three in five (60 per cent) previously serving members have a long term health condition which may impact on their ability to participate in the workforce.

⁹ [Australian Defence Force service | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#) [Accessed 1/11/22]

- People who had served in the ADF were more likely to have volunteered in the previous 12 months (21 per cent) than those that had never served.
- Previous service members and current reservists were more likely to be employed than those who have never served (89 per cent current reservists; 75 per cent of those who had previously served and 74 per cent of those who had never served were employed).
- Previous service members were also more likely to be employed full time (56 per cent) and less likely to be unemployed (three per cent) than those who had never served (44 per cent and four per cent, respectively).
- Females were more likely than males to obtain a bachelor degree or higher. Of these, 49.1 per cent of current female reservists, 15 years and over; 30.8 per cent current females regular serving; 27.4 per cent of females prior serving and 30.5 per cent of females who have never served gain obtained a bachelor degree or higher.

Information from the *Understanding the wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members* report (AIHW 2022), which used 2016 Census data, includes:

- Ex-serving ADF males and females who separated voluntarily:
 - were employed at 84 per cent and 81 per cent respectively
 - had an unemployment rate for those who served 10 years or more, of 4.0 per cent for males and 3.4 per cent for females.
- Those who separated from the ADF involuntarily for medical reasons, compared to those who separated for other reasons:
 - experienced higher unemployment rates
 - had lower levels of education qualifications
 - were receiving lower incomes in 2016.

Building the evidence – current activity

Work is ongoing to improve our understanding of veteran employment and self-employment (veteran-owned business).

This includes projects with the AIHW to explore more detail around veteran employment, projects that are in early stages of planning and participation in a Five Eyes working group on veteran employment research.

Impact and next steps:

Discussion and themes from the Roundtables and information from the growing evidence base around veteran employment has contributed to outcomes for veterans from the Jobs and Skills Summit, contributed to the design of the Australian Government’s Veteran Employment Program, funded in the October 2022-23 Budget, and will contribute to future veteran employment support and policies.

Veteran employment outcomes identified at the Jobs and Skills Summit include:

- a temporary upfront \$4,000 income bank credit for pensioners to allow them to work and earn more before their pension is reduced
- the Australian Public Service Commission offering 1,000 digital traineeships over four years, with a focus on opportunities for women, First Nations people, older Australians and veterans transitioning to civilian life. Partners of veterans are being considered within this offer.

The Government confirmed its commitment to veteran employment with the October 2022-23 Budget announcement of \$24 million over four years for a Veteran Employment Program that will raise awareness and champion veteran employment by ensuring veterans' skills and experience are understood and valued by the wider community. This will include:

- a veteran employment value proposition campaign to promote the benefits of employing veterans, including in areas experiencing skills shortages. This reflects feedback from the Roundtables and other forums, such as the Industry Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, about the need to expand on efforts to deliver a positive narrative around veteran employment. This feedback has been validated by research commissioned and received by DVA following the Roundtables, which suggests that using a strengths-based view of veterans may encourage employers to take the steps necessary to attract this talent pool¹⁰.
- employer support – advice and practical assistance to support businesses to develop and enhance veteran and partner recruitment and retention processes; education and resources to share learnings from effective veteran employment programs and to address employment challenges identified in research and from stakeholder feedback
- recognition of prior learning (RPL) - supporting the expansion or development of RPL programs and support for veterans to encourage recognition of existing skills, encourage the uptake of higher education and assist in creating new and diverse pathways. The existing ADF RPL program will be expanded to include RPL for micro-credentialing of vocational skills and the introduction of a higher education advanced standing program to map non-Australian Qualification Framework courses taken by ADF personnel during service to higher education courses. Working with the tertiary sector, DVA will also offer grant funding to develop and enhance veteran RPL frameworks and support for veterans who pursue further study. This measure responds to both stakeholder feedback and evidence of the structural shift for more positions requiring post-school study and qualifications, as identified by the National Skills Commission¹¹.

The October 2022-23 Budget also provided recognition of the valued skills and attributes of the veteran community, with the National Emergency Management Authority allocated funding of \$38.3 million over four years from 2022-23 to support Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) to upscale its operations. This support will assist DRA, known for its ability to assist affected communities to prepare for, and respond to, natural disasters in partnership with a range of government and non-government relief aid organisations, to significantly increase the volunteer base to the organisation.

More broadly, input to the Government's Employment White Paper¹² is ongoing. Reflecting current research and evidence and input from the Roundtables and other stakeholder fora, DVA is contributing to the development of this document through inter-departmental collaboration and consultation. The Employment White Paper will build on the outcomes of the Jobs and Skills Summit and will have a focus on the objectives of full employment and productivity growth. It is anticipated the White Paper will be released by the end of September 2023.

15 December 2022

¹⁰ *A systematic review of the veteran employment research*, DVA and University of the Sunshine Coast, August 2022

¹¹ [Projecting employment to 2026 | National Skills Commission](#) [accessed 1/11/22]

¹² [Terms of Reference | Treasury.gov.au](#) [accessed 1/11/2022]

Attachment A

Organisations represented at Melbourne and Perth Veteran Employment Roundtables:

- AECOM
- Australia Post
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian Public Service Commission
- BAE Systems Australia
- Bank of Queensland/Industry Advisory Committee on Veteran Employment
- BHP
- Boeing Defence Australia
- Business Foundations, representing National Self Employment Association
- Careerswag and Churchill Scholar – Military (ADF) Spouse Employment and Career Development
- Disaster Relief Australia
- Ironside Resources
- Jobs Australia
- Mineral Resources
- National Employment Services Association
- Precision Technic Defence
- Right Management
- RSL Western Australia (also representing RSL Australia)
- Soldier On
- TacMed Australia
- UGL
- Veteran Community Business Chamber
- WithYouWithMe
- Working Spirit