

## **ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE TO OPEN IN BRISBANE**

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will hold its first public hearing in Brisbane on November 26, 2021.

The ceremonial hearing will be open to the public if COVID restrictions allow. It will also be webcast on the [Royal Commission website](#).

At the official opening, the Commissioners will explain how they will conduct the inquiry.

Royal Commission Chair Nick Kaldas said it marks an important milestone for those personally affected by the tragedy of suicide.

“Many within the defence and veteran community have lost loved ones, or have themselves experienced suicidal thoughts, impulses or actions during or after their military service,” Commissioner Kaldas said.

“As we embark on this inquiry, we hope to learn from the personal experiences of those who have served and their families to identify systemic issues and risk factors that can lead to suicide.”

The Commission’s first block of public hearings will begin in Brisbane on November 29.

The Royal Commission will also begin private sessions in Brisbane in November.

During private sessions, defence members, veterans and their families are invited to share their experiences with a Commissioner in a confidential setting. They will be given the opportunity to raise issues they see as having contributed to suicide and make suggestions for change.

People with lived experience of suicide are invited to apply for a private session, if that is their preference. Private sessions will run for the duration of the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission is also encouraging people to share their experiences by [making a submission](#).

These submissions will help the Commission understand:

- Systemic issues among defence and veteran deaths by suicide
- Risk and protective factors, and
- The availability of support services

The Royal Commission acknowledges that it may be difficult for some to come forward and tell their stories, and support will be available each step of the way.

“Counsellors will be on hand for those who engage with the Royal Commission and our staff will work to ensure these services operate in conjunction with individuals’ existing health and family support networks,” Commissioner Kaldas said.

Last week the Federal Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel announced the appointment of consultants McKinsey & Company to take action to improve the claims system for supporting veterans, administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The Minister is reported to have said that McKinsey & Co would be consulting with bereaved families of veterans who have died by suicide.

The Royal Commission looks forward to learning more about the scope and nature of the actions McKinsey & Co will be taking, and to working with the Department to ensure the interests and wellbeing of bereaved families are protected.

"We recognise the urgent need to make improvements to deliver a faster, more efficient and effective system for all veterans and their families," Commissioner Kaldas said.

"We will consider all the changes arising from this process, either recommended or implemented, as part of our inquiry and final report.

"We are mindful that with both organisations seeking to work closely with Defence members, veterans and their families, our processes should support those involved and avoid being duplicative, conflicting, or otherwise overwhelming," Commissioner Kaldas said.

The Royal Commission was established on July 8, 2021, to address the high suicide rates among those who have served in the Australian Defence Forces. It will produce an interim report by August 11, 2022 and a final report by June 15, 2023.

For more information, visit the [Royal Commission website](#).

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