

To keep you informed about the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, the RSL NSW Royal Commission Office has prepared a summary of the Sydney Hearing Block, including the key themes examined so far and the actions of the League in response.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide received close to 6,000 submissions and conducted more than 700 private sessions across the country. The RSL has had representatives present at all hearings, and has been listening to and acting on the evidence presented.

### **The Final Public Hearing Block – 4-28 March, Sydney**

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide conducted its final public hearing at the InterContinental Sydney, from Monday 4 March to Thursday 28 March 2024.

The Royal Commission's inquiries have been guided by the deeply personal and often harrowing experiences shared by current-serving and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and their families. These submissions have shone a bright light on the cultural, systemic and structural issues contributing to the suicide crisis within the Defence and veteran community.

The final Sydney Hearing Block focussed on identifying factors that could indicate risk of suicide and suicide behaviours, while also engaging with senior Ministers, ADF personnel and Federal Government departmental heads to determine the improvements required to better support veterans and their families.

In his final address, Commissioner Nick Kaldas expressed his belief that the Royal Commission must be a catalyst for change, with a whole-of-government approach to prioritise the complex, long-term reforms required to substantially improve support to former and current ADF personnel, and their families. He noted ongoing concern about the lack of data available to monitor progress and effective reform within the Defence community.

The Commission engaged with senior Ministers and departmental heads responsible for implementing reforms and processes to improve support for veterans. Acknowledgment of past maladministration and practices affecting current- and former-serving ADF members was made, with a commitment to improving policies and processes around discharge, support, postings and unacceptable behaviour.

Chief of the ADF, General Angus Campbell, stated that, "Our people deserve and should rightly expect the wellbeing support and care they need both during and after their service. I acknowledge that this has not always been the case and has tragically led to the deaths by suicide of some of our people."

RSL NSW would like to thank Commissioners Nick Kaldas, Peggy Brown, and James Douglas, for their tireless work throughout the Royal Commission process and their dedication to improving the support available to veterans from the community and the ADF. RSL NSW would also like to thank those who presented and provided their input, as well as those who contributed to the RSL's submissions.

RSL NSW welcomes the delivery of the Royal Commission's Final Report in September 2024, and supports the anticipated recommendation regarding the establishment of an independent entity to monitor and engage with Defence and the veteran community on the issue of veteran health and wellbeing.

Australian veterans need – and deserve – immediate government action to address the many factors that lead to veteran suicide. The response to the Royal Commission's Final Report can kickstart this change.

RSL NSW is committed to working with all levels of Government, the ESO sector and the veteran community to coordinate the response needed to minimise risk of suicide and improve the wellbeing of Australia's veteran community.

If you have been impacted by providing or listening to evidence from the Royal Commission, please reach out to the below organisations for immediate assistance:

Lifeline Australia	13 11 14
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467
OpenArms	1800 011 046
ADF Mental health All-Hours Support Line	1800 628 036
Safe Zone Support	1800 142 072
Defence Member and Family Helpline	1800 624 608