

# Speech - Minister Keogh - Ministerial Summit on Veterans' Affairs

Department of Veterans' Affairs

OFFICIAL



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MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

SPEECH

**MINISTERIAL SUMMIT ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA (ROK)

**WEDNESDAY, 26 JULY 2023**

*\*\*\* CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY \*\*\**

Good Afternoon everyone, I'm so proud to join you to commemorate the service and sacrifice of veterans from each of our nations during the Korean War.

Last year I had the honour of meeting 94 year old Captain Norman Goldspink, who was part of Australia's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Korea in 1952.

At the time of the Korean War, Australia was a very different place and I thought I'd share with you some of our reflections of how far we've come.

Then, Australia did not have a universal health system and veterans heavily relied on Government run Hospitals for veterans, and later, veterans had special government funded access to health services.

But since 1984 all Australians have had access to our universal healthcare system, called Medicare, and subsequently the Australian Government stopped running Veteran Hospitals and instead purchases such support for Veterans from the private hospital sector.

In the early 2000s, Australia shifted focus in support from income support pensions for those returned from specific conflicts, to a rehabilitation and compensation focus for any veteran.

**In Australia we now define a “veteran” as anyone who has done one day of full time service in the Australian Defence Force.**

Veterans who have undertaken this one day of service are eligible for support for all mental health conditions and medical treatment for accepted service related injuries or conditions.

You don't need to prove a mental health condition is connected to service to receive Government funded mental health support in Australia.

Which brings me to one of the most significant changes to how veterans are supported and perceived.

In 2005 a study of the health of Korean War Veterans found that they were five or six times more likely to suffer mental health conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety than Australian civilians.

This was similar to the experience of our Vietnam Veterans, some 20 years later.

While we cannot change the war-related experiences and responses of the past, we can learn and grow from them.

In Australia this has been significant, with Vietnam Veterans successfully lobbying for a specialised counselling and support service for veterans and their families, that's now known as Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling.

It's the experience of Australian veterans, and their families, that has informed much of the world leading research and initiatives Australia has now achieved in the mental health space.

Captain Goldspink and I had the opportunity to discuss the journey Australia has been on since Korea in how we support not only veterans themselves, but veteran families.

The burdens that come with service are not born by veterans alone.

Veteran families are often the first responders when a defence member, or veteran is encountering injury or illness, be it mental or physical.

In recognition of that, the Australian Government places great emphasis on supporting veterans and veteran families from the day they sign up, to long after they have hung up their uniform for the last time.

We are focusing on better supporting defence personnel as they transition into civilian life and a wellbeing focus for veterans.

We're also rolling out Veterans' and Families Hubs across the country to improve access to services and supports for veteran families close to home.

There is still much more to do, our rate of veteran suicide is a national tragedy and this is being addressed through our Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. We're now taking action on all of their interim recommendations and look forward to receiving the Royal Commission's final report.

Our veterans and veteran families have made great sacrifices for each of our nations, but they've achieved and contributed so much to our communities.

It is incumbent on all of us to make sure they receive the services and supports they need and deserve.

It's the least we can do.

*ENDS*

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