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MEDIA RELEASE

### **RSL welcomes Government approach to veteran suicides**

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has welcomed the announcement by Prime Minister Scott Morrison to appoint an independent commissioner into veteran suicides.

National President Major General Greg Melick congratulated the Government on its measured response that would see initial findings and recommendations made sooner than later, as well as create an ongoing focus on what is a serious and concerning problem.

General Melick said the RSL was particularly pleased that the independent commissioner would focus on veteran well-being and mental health issues and the ongoing nature of the appointment was something advocated for by the RSL, rather than a 'once only, backward-looking' Royal Commission.

"The RSL will fully support the commissioner and is determined to assist the process in any way it is able," he said.

"Statistics indicate that the suicide rate while in service is considerably lower than the general population but is higher once personnel transition out of the armed forces.

"This transition is obviously a critical period and is the subject of current collaborative research between RSL Qld and the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation."

General Melick said the RSL was already working on a number of fronts to seek to reduce veteran suicides including:

- Our partnership with Open Arms to provide suicide awareness training across Australia for people who have contact with veterans;
- Our involvement in adaptive and regular sports programs to enhance both physical and mental health; and
- An RSL team of more than 300 trained advocates around Australia who help veterans manage their way through the compensation and rehabilitation processes, thereby reducing their stress and feelings of confusion.

"A number of initiatives and programs have been developed and are in progress to support veterans and these are already starting to have a positive impact.

"Veterans face enormous challenges and issues such as depression and re-assimilation into the community and the sad reality is that suicide amongst veterans is unacceptably high. Even one veteran taking his or her life is one tragedy too many.

“The independent commissioner will provide a next level of inquiry and an ongoing ability to provide recommendations to government and this must assist in achieving better outcomes for our veterans,” General Melick said.

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