

Information on COVID-19 for veterans and their families

This factsheet contains information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and how it may affect veterans and their families. Please note that the COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, as is the response of the Australian Government and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

DVA has a Pandemic Business Continuity Plan in place to provide critical support and services to veterans and their families as the situation develops. DVA's number one priority is the health and wellbeing of Australia's veterans and their families.

For up-to-date information on the pandemic as a whole, visit the Australian Government Department of Health's website (health.gov.au) or phone the Coronavirus Health Information Line 24/7 on **1800 020 080**. For information on how the pandemic affects DVA services and payments, please check the DVA website (dva.gov.au), our social media or phone the VAN on **1800 555 254**.

The following are condensed versions of articles that appear in full on the 'Latest News for Veterans' page on the DVA website (dva.gov.au) and click on 'Newsroom'.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against this virus. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet,
- use alcohol-based hand sanitiser regularly, especially if you have been in public spaces,
- cover your cough or sneeze, and dispose of tissues,
- if unwell, avoid contact with others.

Another way to slow the spread of the virus is to practise social distancing. The Government has now limited both indoor and outdoor gatherings to two persons, except where:

- people of the same household are going out together
- funerals – a maximum of 10 people
- wedding – a maximum of 5 people
- family units

All Australians, including veterans and their families, should stay home unless:

- shopping for food and necessary supplies
- medical or health care needs, including compassionate requirements
- exercise in compliance with the public gathering requirements
- work and study if you can't work or learn remotely.

Seniors and people with existing health conditions should self-isolate at home to the maximum extent practicable.

The following groups should quarantine at home wherever possible:

- people over 70 years old
- people over 60 years old with comorbidities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders over 50 years old.

Who must isolate?

To help limit the spread of COVID-19, and reduce the burden on the health system, you **MUST** isolate yourself in the following circumstances:

- If you have returned from any country overseas you **MUST** isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of arrival in Australia
- If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you **MUST** isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of last contact with the confirmed case
- If you develop any symptoms during the 14 days you should contact your GP surgery by phone
- People who must isolate need to stay at home and must not attend public places, in particular **DO NOT** go to work, school, childcare, or attend public offices such as your local VAN office. Older and at-risk veterans, or those in self-isolation, can access shopping provided via Veterans' Home Care at this time. Only people who usually live in the household should be in the home
- Where possible, get friends or family who are not required to be isolated to get food or other necessities for you. If you must leave the home to seek medical care, wear a mask if you have one and ensure you call the doctor's clinic or hospital to forewarn them of your arrival

What to do if you develop symptoms

You should telephone your doctor's surgery ahead of time and explain your circumstances. They can then advise you accordingly. Alternatively you can call the Coronavirus Health Information Line 24/7 on **1800 020 080** and be transferred to a Registered Nurse.

Economic Support Payments

On 12 March, the Australian Government announced a \$17.6 billion stimulus package, including a \$750 payment to those who receive certain DVA benefits, including:

- Service Pension, Partner Service Pension, Income Support Supplement or Veteran Payment
- Disability Pension
- Special Rate Disability pension
- Permanent Impairment compensation
- War Widow(er)'s Pension or Wholly Dependent Partner payment
- Gold Cards, Commonwealth Seniors Health Cards and Pensioner Concession Cards
- DVA Education Schemes, where recipients are aged 16 and over
- Age or Wife Pension paid by DVA.

These payments will be made automatically to eligible people's nominated bank accounts from 31 March 2020 to people who will have been on one of the eligible payments any time between 12 March 2020 and 13 April 2020.

On 22 March, the Government released the second stage of its economic plan and will provide a further \$750 payment to social security recipients and those receiving the above DVA benefits. However, it will not be payable to those who receive the Coronavirus supplement, which is an additional \$550 per fortnight on top of social security payments such as JobSeeker Payment. This second payment will be made automatically from 13 July 2020.

There is no need to lodge a claim, but you should ensure that DVA has your correct bank details and address. To make sure your details are up to date, log into MyService or call DVA on **1800 555 254**.

Veterans and their families running businesses will also be supported by the measures announced to keep businesses in business, including payments and supporting business loans.

For more information, please check the Prime Minister's website (pm.gov.au).

Services at DVA VAN offices

For the safety of both staff and veterans and their families there will be some changes to the provision of face-to-face services at DVA VAN offices.

Veterans and their families are advised not to enter a VAN office if they:

- have returned from overseas within the last two weeks
- have had close contact with someone suffering from the COVID-19 coronavirus
- are feeling unwell.

Although VAN offices remain open at the present time, the situation is very unpredictable and this may change as circumstances change.

We recommend that you do not attend a VAN office unless the enquiry is urgent and it is absolutely necessary to undertake business face to face.

Veterans and their families who require assistance should call **1800 555 254** or lodge an online enquiry.

Deeming rate reductions

Clients who receive income support payments from DVA will soon benefit from changes to the way financial assets are assessed. A financial asset is deemed to earn a set rate of return, regardless of how much interest a financial asset actually earns.

On 22 March, the Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a second cut to deeming rates. This will mean that the deeming rate will decrease from 1.0 per cent to 0.25 per cent for financial investments up to \$51,800 for singles and \$86,200 for couples. It will be cut from 3.0 per cent to 2.25 per cent for investments over these amounts.

The deeming rates reduction takes effect from 1 May 2020. You don't need to do anything. If you have deemed income, DVA will automatically apply the new deeming rates.

Telehealth, medicine delivery & shopping aid

The Government has extended telehealth measures to all Australians. Veterans and their families can access health services from their homes via video link or telephone. These telehealth services include access to medical professionals, specialists and mental health professionals. Those who need to visit their doctor face-to-face can continue to do so.

The Government has also advised that vulnerable people, including eligible veterans, can order their Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) prescriptions online or remotely, and have their medicines home-delivered to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19. Contact your pharmacy for more information.

Further, older and at-risk veterans, or those in self-isolation, can access shopping provided via Veterans' Home Care and Household Services. Call a VHC Assessment Agency directly on **1300 550 450**.

More information as to eligibility is available on the DVA website (dva.gov.au).

For information on medicine delivery visit the Department of Health's website (health.gov.au).

Mental health services

If you are feeling anxious, or have concerns about the spread of COVID-19, call Open Arms on **1800 011 046**. Open Arms can reschedule your appointment or discuss options for telephone or video conferencing.

Additionally, the Government has committed \$74 million to support other whole-of-population mental health services, including:

- a dedicated coronavirus wellbeing support line, delivered by Beyond Blue, to support those who may feel anxious or have experienced stress due to the impacts of the virus
- increasing the capacity of mental health services such as Lifeline and Kids Helpline, as well as other digital mental health services
- digital training of front-line health workers to enable them to provide mental health support, and
- expanding the Community Visitors Scheme to provide the capability for staff and volunteer visitors to connect with older people in aged care online and by phone, and assist older Australians keep in touch with the community and loved ones.