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**Sent:** Friday, 29 May 2020 12:00 PM  
**To:** OPENARMS.OPCMANAGEMENT  
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## OUTREACH PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

*A service founded by Vietnam veterans, now for all veterans*

May 2020



Hi all

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the Open Arms service and how we came to be. It is important, particularly for our new members, to know the history of Open Arms and how the Vietnam Veterans have ensured that all future generations of veterans have access to free mental health support.

The Vietnam War was a difficult chapter in Australia's history. For those who served, the experience forged strong bonds and a commitment to look after one another. In 1982 the first Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service centre opened in Adelaide. This was an incredible achievement of the Vietnam veterans, who lobbied the Australian Government for a specialised counselling support service for veterans and their families.

In 2007 eligibility to access support was extended to all conflicts and to veteran's families—which was reflected in the new name Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS).

Ten years down the track, we commenced extensive research on our brand and name. The lack of awareness the service had and the uncertainty of those eligible to access services indicated we needed to change our name and image, then re-launch the new brand.

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling was launched in October 2018. It was important that our new name was symbolic to the Vietnam Veteran cohort, as this service is their legacy. Open arms are a powerful symbol of support, safety and security. During the Vietnam War, veterans spent long periods in the jungle and their lifeline was the Huey helicopter. One soldier would stand in an open field with raised open arms. This individual would be completely vulnerable and courageous, much like the vulnerability we feel and the courage we show when seeking mental health support.

The orange in our logo represents our past, as the original colour for the service in 1982. Orange is a small reminder of the appreciation we have for the Vietnam Veteran cohort for founding this service, and ensuring that our serving men and women can access free mental health support.

Kind Regards

Dr Stephanie Hodson  
National Manager – Open Arms



## **‘VERA’ – The Open Arms Client Management System**

Did you know we are a dedicated VERA Service Desk team available between 9am-5pm weekdays to assist you with VERA?

If you are experiencing problems logging in or with VERA functionality, please send an email to [AMBVERACHD@dva.gov.au](mailto:AMBVERACHD@dva.gov.au).

Please include as much information as possible so we can efficiently process your request, including a return phone number.

We have below some VERA hints and tips to minimise issues and guide you to get the best out of the system.

- We suggest the below browsers when accessing VERA to ensure optimum functionality.
  - Google Chrome
  - Microsoft Edge
  - Mozilla Firefox
  - Safari

**Please Note:** *Certain functionality in VERA will not display correctly when using Internet Explorer.*

- Always log out of VERA using the logout button in the bottom left hand corner to avoid being locked out or have difficulties logging back in.
- VERA Task Cards are available in the 'Quick Link' section of the [Open Arms COVID-19 Self-service](#) space. Use these to help you learn more about navigating VERA.

**Important:** *Email the VERA Service Desk and your Open Arms centre when you're ABN and/or banking details have changed – this will ensure your account is updated to avoid delays in payments.*

Continue to contact your case coordinator or local Open Arms centre for any clinical queries related to client service file management or Open Arms processes.

## Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan 2020-2023

The Minister for Veterans Affairs recently launched the ***Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan 2020-2023.***

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

This strategy was designed in collaboration with veterans, current serving members, families, government, researchers, peak health bodies, service providers and ex-service organisations. It will guide the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Government investment and actions, including service provision by Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling, to address veteran mental health and suicide prevention over the next four years.

In launching the Strategy, Minister Chester acknowledged the Government's commitment to putting veterans and their families first, and noted mental health and wellbeing are a key priority for the Government and DVA.

## Payment Delays due to Public Holidays

Please be aware, both National and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Public Holidays that occur on a standard business day may cause a delay in the processing and payment of OPC invoicing.

Please allow for one to two additional business days for payment to clear into your account.

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

## COVID-19 Self Service space updates

The following resources have recently been added to the Open Arms [COVID-19 Self Service space](#):

### **Crisis Support Services Directory** (new section)

Crisis services available presented by state/region

### **Quick Links**

Safe Work Australia – COVID-19 Resource kit for working environment

### **Professional Development Opportunities**

Webinar: Beyond prevention, which active interventions, at scale will flatten the mental health and suicide curve post-COVID-19

### **Announcements**

Kookaburra Kids Connect

## UPCOMING EVENTS - JUNE

1st – Reconciliation Day (ACT & WA)

8th – Queen's Birthday (National except QLD & WA)

10th – 75th Anniversary Oboe 6 landings at Balikpapan, Borneo

24th – 70th Anniversary of commencement of the Korean War

## SHOUT OUTS ACROSS THE REGIONS

**VIC** "I attended your "Beating the blues" group program in Melbourne on 21-22 November 2019. It has now been two months since the program, and I have been surprised that the strategies discussed in the program have, up to now, significantly reduced the frequency and depth of my depression occurrences. At 75, I had doubts that I was 'too set in my ways' to benefit from the program. Thanks for allowing me to participate. I wish to also record my compliments and appreciation of the female facilitator on my program. She is a great communicator, able to get program participants to 'open-up' on their very personal struggles, and clearly had great experience. She was a standout"

**TAS** "Since my medical discharge I have and will continue to use Open Arms whenever I feel the need to. I feel strongly that your service is impeccable"

**NSW** "Open Arms provides such a crucially important service and so many current and former serving members are grateful. Natasha is a brilliant counsellor who has made a huge difference in my life in a very short period of time. She is able to rapidly understand client's needs and adjust her communication style accordingly. She is very professional and competent and has been able to provide me with a wide range of tools."

**SQLD** "Bronwyn was so professional and helpful. I felt very comfortable and supported throughout the sessions. I feel very lucky that I was able to access someone as qualified and insightful as her and truly believe she is a big part of the reason my mental health has improved so much."

**NQLD** "Tim did a good job of steering me in the right direction. A very supportive person who I found only too willing to help. Many Thanks"

**NT** "I was extremely happy with the service Bec provided and would highly recommend her to anyone seeking support for their child. The process of getting my son in for counselling was quick and easy. Thank you."

**SA** "I was very happy with the counselling service provided by Peter. He understood the nature of Defence duties and was able to relate/understand the specific issues I was having and provide supportive guidance. I would highly recommend his service."

**ACT** "I had a fantastic experience with this service at every stage, from first call to the service, right through to my final appointment with Kate. Kate was professional, warm, easy to talk to, and helped me understand all my options for treating anxiety. I have already recommended this service and specifically Kate to a friend."

## WEBINAR INVITATION

## The Practitioner Broadcast: How multi-disciplinary care can improve the lives of veterans with mental health problems

Join the *Practitioner Support Service* for an expert discussion on the value of a multi-disciplinary model of care.

**Thursday 18 June - 9.00am to 10.30am (AEST)**

Hear from the Centenary of Anzac Centre Practitioner Support Service's panel of multi-disciplinary experts as they discuss how this model of care can help practitioners who work with veterans to improve treatment outcomes. They will share their experience, knowledge and practical strategies to help practitioners engage and collaborate with other members of the health care team.

- Dr John Cooper, Consultant Psychiatrist - Moderator
- Jane Nursey, Director Practitioner Support Service
- Dr Geoff Thompson, Psychiatrist
- Jane Pool, Mental Health Social Worker
- Dr Richard Bonwick, Psychiatrist
- Dr Phil Parker, General Practitioner

The Practitioner Broadcast is a free 90-minute webinar suitable for all practitioners who work with veterans with mental health problems.

This webinar is proudly presented by the Centenary of Anzac Centre, an initiative of Phoenix Australia.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

## RESTORE TRIAL

The RESTORE Trial is a joint partnership between Phoenix Australia, Department of Defence (Defence) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), supported by Open Arms Clinical Services. In its current form, prolonged exposure (PE) therapy [the gold-standard treatment for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)] can be difficult for ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel to commit to due to the duration of treatment (10 weeks).

The RESTORE Trial will investigate whether an intensive delivery of PE therapy, involving 10 sessions over a two week period, will deliver outcomes which are comparable to the gold standard PE treatment protocol. If proven efficacious, this study will increase the accessibility of treatment options for Open Arms clients and will influence international treatment guidelines.

On 5 May 2020 Phoenix Australia trained ten Open Arms therapists to deliver PE therapy by telehealth. This means client who are socially isolated or do not live within a suitable distance of a RESTORE Trial site (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and Townsville) will soon be able to access tis treatment and participate in the RESTORE Trial. We will be providing further advice around this development shortly, but in the meantime if you have any \questions direct them to [openarms.innovation@dva.gov.au](mailto:openarms.innovation@dva.gov.au).

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