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AMA honours armed service personnel on Remembrance Day and encourages mental health check up

The Australian Medical Association encourages past and present armed service personnel experiencing mental health challenges to seek help from their doctor.

Speaking on Remembrance Day, AMA President Professor Steve Robson — a former Royal Australian Navy medical officer — said the AMA acknowledges and honours Australian doctors past and present who have served as medical officers in armed conflicts.

“On Remembrance Day, I honour the lives lost in service and acknowledge those currently serving,” Professor Robson said.

"I also know this service can cause serious mental health challenges, which can reverberate through to families and loved ones.

“As a doctor and former serviceman, I would urge ex service personnel to seek help from their GP sooner rather than later to deal with these. I understand people might try to ‘push through’, but this will only compound illness. And there is help out there.”

Professor Robson said GPs and others treating service personnel need to be aware of the lingering and lasting mental harm from active service.

“It’s hard for anyone, including civilian doctors to really understand the full impact active service can have on mental health, and certainly few will have had real experience of it.

“I was a medical officer on HMAS Sydney during the first Gulf War and treated serving members who suffered serious physical and emotional injuries. In some respects, the emotional injuries left mental scars that were more serious and disabling than most physical injuries.

“There is Medicare-funded support that doctors should be aware of through the [Veterans’ Health Check program](#) to encourage early intervention in the transition to civilian life with a comprehensive physical and mental health assessment for veterans.

“I’m proud to have had the opportunity to treat and help care for many serving and ex-defence individuals in my work of 20 years in Canberra. My own service has created a common bond with them and Remembrance Day is a poignant reminder of our experiences during that service.

“Australians and Australian doctors have served on the frontline of wars for as long as we have been a nation and today, we see war against Ukraine, civil war in Syria and Yemen and terrorist insurgencies in Afghanistan and countries in Africa, so this is not just a part of history, it’s part of our present,” Professor Robson said.

Department of Veterans' Affairs Chief Health Officer, Doctor Jenny Firman said it is important for veterans to engage with health programs early.

“Leaving the Australian Defence Force can have a significant impact on the physical and emotional health of veterans, and the earlier veterans can access health services, the better the outcomes they may achieve,” Doctor Firman said.

“Veterans can access a range of services to support their health and wellbeing through the Veteran Card. Any member of the ADF who has served at least one day of full-time service is eligible to receive a Veteran Card, which enables them to access and pay for a wide range of healthcare services.

“There are resources available for GPs and other veteran health providers to help them understand the health needs of veterans based on their unique military experience. DVA recently launched quick guides to make it easier for providers to understand the [Veteran Card](#) system and [item numbers for DVA programs](#).

“Health providers play a key role in the veteran support system, and we are committed to ensuring all components of the system are well supported and informed.”

More information on the resources for veteran health providers is [here](#).

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