

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 14 Veterans

The veteran community includes current and ex-servicemen and women as well as their spouses and widows. In March 2021, approximately 182,000 people were either receiving income support or a compensation pension from the Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs. Amongst the service pensioners, all World War II veterans were aged 90 or over with an average age of 96; all Korean War veterans were over 80, average age 87; and almost all Vietnam veterans were aged over 65 with an average age of 74.

The experience of veterans varies according to whether they served in operational or non-operational roles, their age during their period of service, their service branch and rank, the type of conflict, their experience of combat or of being a prisoner-of-

war. It is widely accepted that military service can have long-term effects on both physical and mental health.

Common mental health conditions include Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), anxiety and depressive disorders, survivor guilt and alcohol and other drugs dependence.

Common physical health problems include gastrointestinal conditions, chronic pain, hearing loss, tinnitus, arthritis and cancer. Veterans often experience an early onset of these physical conditions and can be prone to multiple chronic health conditions. They are more likely than the general population to be vulnerable to homelessness.

Veterans often report challenges in transitioning from military to civilian life. This can impact on their sense of identity, feelings of belonging and family relationships. Most often, veterans value an ongoing connection with the veteran community through ex-service associations and informal networks. Staying in touch with the veteran community and commemorating fallen colleagues can be very important to maintaining good mental health.

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In addition to income support, veterans are entitled to a range of health benefits, support programs and specific aged care services.

The Veteran Gold Card and White Card give access to clinically required healthcare treatment. The Veteran Orange Card provides medicines at a concession rate. The Veterans' Home Care Program provides low-level care including domestic assistance, personal care, light garden maintenance and respite.

Veterans can also access CHSP and Home Care Packages. They may find it challenging to navigate two systems, those only available through the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and those available to the general older population.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

In working with veterans, it is important for service providers to understand:

- the benefits and supports available to veterans through DVA and ex-service associations
- that veterans may view acceptance of support and care services as a sign of weakness that challenges their strong feelings of self-determination and self-sufficiency
- veterans may not want to talk about their service experience or, alternatively, want people to hear their stories
- the impact of PTSD and mental health issues and avoid triggering traumatic responses
- the importance of maintaining links with the veteran community.

For further information, see **Sheet 17: Resources – Resource Nos. 4, 7, 11, 24, 25**