

Mental Health and Wellbeing After Military Service



Transitioning from military service to civilian life is a profound shift. For many veterans, it represents the end of a career defined by discipline, camaraderie, purpose, and sacrifice. Yet, leaving the structured environment of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) also brings a unique set of emotional and psychological challenges. Whether you've served in combat, supported operations from afar, or contributed in logistics, health, intelligence or administration, the impact of military life can stay with you long after your uniform is folded away.

Mental health and wellbeing after military service are topics that deserve our full attention. For some veterans, this period is marked by a sense of liberation and growth. For others, it can bring unexpected struggles—feelings of loss, disconnection, or symptoms of anxiety, depression, and trauma. Recognising these experiences is essential not just for those who've served, but also for their families, friends, GPs, and mental health professionals.

At Monarch Mental Health Group (MMHG), we are committed to supporting veterans on their path to recovery. Our psychiatrist-led teams deliver comprehensive care, informed by the latest research through the Monarch Research Institute. This eBook is designed to provide understanding, reassurance, and practical pathways for care.

Chapter 1: Navigating the Civilian Transition: Identity, Purpose, and Belonging

Leaving the military isn't just a logistical shift—it's a personal transformation. Veterans often find themselves asking: Who am I without my rank? Where do I belong? What's next? The transition to civilian life can stir up feelings of uncertainty, disconnection, and even grief for the identity and structure that service provided.

Military life brings a strong sense of purpose and camaraderie. After discharge, many veterans miss that shared mission and close-knit support. The pace of civilian life can feel disorienting or isolating in comparison. Some may struggle to relate to those who haven't served or feel misunderstood in workplace or social settings.

Rebuilding a sense of identity and belonging is key to mental wellbeing. This can include exploring new interests, education or training, community involvement, or mentoring others. Finding meaningful work and creating new social circles also helps reinforce a sense of purpose.

Monarch's team understands the psychological toll of identity disruption. Our clinicians can help you process these changes and find new, fulfilling ways to define who you are—beyond service.

Chapter 2: The Psychological Impact of Military Service

Serving in the military builds strength, resilience, and leadership—but it also exposes individuals to intense stressors that can leave a lasting psychological imprint. The ADF requires high levels of emotional control, endurance, and rapid decision-making in high-risk environments. Even when these stressors are not immediately traumatic, they can accumulate over time.

Common Conditions Affecting Veterans

Military service can have profound and lasting psychological effects. Australian veterans are significantly more likely than the general population to experience mental health challenges, particularly in the years following discharge. According to a study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2022), one in five contemporary ex-serving ADF members accessed mental health services within a year of leaving the military, with a higher proportion of ex-serving ADF members admitted to public hospitals for mental health, alcohol and drug use and intentional self-harm than the Australian population. Below are some of the most commonly diagnosed conditions:

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD is one of the most prevalent conditions affecting veterans. It arises after exposure to traumatic events such as combat, explosions, or witnessing the death or injury of others. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbness, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviours. Veterans with PTSD may feel constantly on edge or find themselves reliving distressing moments from service.

- **Depression and Major Depressive Disorder**

Depression is often underdiagnosed in military populations due to stigma and the expectation of emotional resilience. Symptoms include persistent sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, irritability, changes in sleep or appetite, and difficulty engaging with daily life. The AIHW reports that ex-serving personnel are more likely to be hospitalised for affective disorders—including depression—than civilians.

- **Anxiety Disorders**

Veterans may develop generalised anxiety, panic disorder, or social anxiety, particularly during the transition to civilian life. Feelings of restlessness, fear, or difficulty functioning in everyday environments can be overwhelming, especially without the structure and predictability of military routine.

- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

Though less frequently discussed, OCD can develop or be exacerbated by the high-pressure, rule-bound nature of service. Veterans may experience intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviours that interfere with their daily functioning.

- **Adult Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

The structured environment of the military may mask symptoms of ADHD, such as inattention, impulsivity, or difficulty with organisation. These symptoms often become more noticeable post-service, especially in unstructured civilian roles. Undiagnosed ADHD can contribute to frustration, poor job performance, and mental distress.

- **Chronic Pain and Tinnitus**

Physical conditions like chronic musculoskeletal pain and tinnitus are common among veterans and can be deeply intertwined with mental health. Persistent pain can increase the risk of depression and anxiety, while tinnitus—constant ringing in the ears—can heighten stress and disrupt sleep.

Research has shown that veterans experience mental health disorders at higher rates than the general population, with PTSD and depression among the most common. Unfortunately, stigma and a culture of stoicism can prevent timely diagnosis and treatment.

At Monarch, our mental health services are designed to identify and treat these conditions early. We tailor treatment to your needs, always respecting your background, strengths, and experiences.

Chapter 3: Recognising the Signs: When to Seek Help

Mental health conditions can develop gradually or surface long after discharge. It's important for veterans and their loved ones to be aware of the signs that support may be needed.

Psychological and Emotional Symptoms

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability or anger outbursts
- Anxiety or constant worry
- Emotional numbness or detachment
- Flashbacks or intrusive memories
- Avoidance of reminders of service
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

Physical and Behavioural Changes

- Sleep disturbances
- Loss of interest in hobbies or relationships
- Changes in appetite
- Substance use or increased alcohol consumption
- Withdrawal from family and social life
- Risk-taking or reckless behaviour

It's also common for symptoms to appear as physical complaints—headaches, stomach issues, or chronic pain—especially in those reluctant to speak about emotions. Partners, friends, and GPs can play a vital role in identifying early warning signs and encouraging treatment.

Monarch offers comprehensive assessments, including Adult ADHD evaluations and 291 psychiatric assessments, to ensure the right diagnosis and treatment pathway is in place from the start.

Chapter 4: Treatment Pathways: What Help Looks Like

There is no single pathway to mental health recovery. At Monarch, we provide a suite of treatment options to address the diverse needs of veterans. All treatment is evidence-based, compassionate, and tailored to your goals.

Psychiatric Services and Medication Support

Our psychiatrists offer thorough diagnostic assessments and medication reviews. We collaborate with your GP or existing mental health providers to optimise current medications or introduce next step medication strategies, including newer options for treatment-resistant conditions.

Psychological Therapy

Our qualified psychologists provide:

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Trauma-focused CBT
- Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Mindfulness-based therapies
- Supportive therapy for families and carers

Therapy can be life-changing—helping veterans reframe traumatic experiences, manage symptoms, and rebuild a sense of self outside the military.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

- **Repetitive TMS (rTMS):** Supports treatment for [depression](#), [anxiety](#), [PTSD](#), and [OCD](#).
- **Deep TMS (dTMS):** A non-invasive option that targets deeper brain regions, particularly effective in OCD and treatment-resistant depression.

TMS is painless, doesn't require anaesthesia, and can be delivered in the clinic without time off work or long recovery periods. It is also effective for [medication-resistant depression](#).

Nasal Spray For Depression

For individuals living with treatment-resistant depression—defined as a form of depression that has not improved after trying at least two different types of antidepressant medication—nasal spray therapy may offer a new avenue for relief.

This treatment option is approved specifically for people who have not experienced success with conventional antidepressants. For many, it provides a new sense of hope—a chance to experience what life might feel like without the daily burden of depression.

Unlike traditional antidepressants, which work by increasing the levels of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine (chemical messengers or neurotransmitters that influence mood), the nasal spray targets a different system in the brain. It increases levels of glutamate, the most abundant excitatory neurotransmitter in the brain. Glutamate plays a key role in neural activation and communication, and boosting its availability is believed to help reset abnormal brain activity patterns linked to depression.

By working through this distinct mechanism, nasal spray therapy may bring about faster symptom relief in some patients, often within hours or days, compared to the weeks it can take for traditional medications to take effect.

For veterans and ex-service personnel whose depression has not responded to typical treatment pathways, nasal spray therapy, when administered under psychiatric supervision, may be a valuable next step in the journey toward mental wellbeing.

Medication Assisted Psychotherapy

Monarch launched Australia's first Medication Assisted Psychotherapy program in 2023. This innovative therapy supports individuals experiencing significant trauma or those resistant to other treatments, offering a new path to healing.

Holistic, Collaborative Care

Every Monarch patient receives a tailored treatment plan created by our multidisciplinary team. We also monitor progress closely to adjust treatments when needed, ensuring the best possible clinical outcomes.

Chapter 4: Breaking the Stigma: Encouraging Help-Seeking

Stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to care. Many veterans have been conditioned to 'push through' psychological pain and prioritise duty over personal wellbeing. While these traits are admirable, they can delay much-needed support.

Changing the Narrative

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Like a muscle strain or broken bone, psychological injuries need assessment, rest, and treatment. Delaying care often leads to worsening symptoms and prolonged recovery.

At Monarch, we create a safe, confidential, and respectful space where you can speak freely. We understand the unique cultural, emotional, and psychological factors involved in military service, and we're here to help without judgement.

Seeking help is a sign of strength—not weakness. It means you're taking control of your life and reclaiming your wellbeing.

Chapter 5: Family, Friends and Support Networks: Their Role in Recovery

Veterans do not walk the path to recovery alone. The support of family, friends, partners, and even colleagues can have a powerful impact on mental health outcomes. These relationships can be a source of strength, stability, and hope. However, mental health challenges related to military service—such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression—can also put relationships under considerable strain.

Emotional withdrawal, difficulty expressing feelings, or uncharacteristic anger and irritability are just a few ways mental health struggles can affect interpersonal dynamics. Loved ones may feel helpless, confused, or burdened, especially if they aren't sure how to offer meaningful support. That's why education and communication are essential.

Support networks play an important role in encouraging veterans to seek help and stay engaged with treatment. This might mean recognising early signs of distress, listening without judgement, or gently prompting the person to connect with a professional. Attending appointments together, helping to manage daily routines, or simply being present through ups and downs can all make a difference.

It's equally important for carers to care for themselves. Supporting someone through recovery can be emotionally and physically draining. Seeking personal counselling, taking time for rest, or joining a support group can help maintain balance and prevent burnout.

At Monarch, we believe healing extends beyond the individual. Our teams offer psychoeducation and family-inclusive therapeutic support to strengthen the entire care network. When families understand what their loved one is experiencing—and receive guidance on how to respond—it creates a more stable and nurturing environment for recovery.

Supporting a veteran's mental health journey isn't about having all the answers—it's about walking beside them with compassion, patience, and understanding. With the right support systems in place, meaningful recovery becomes possible.

Chapter 6: Accessing Support: DVA, Medicare, and Navigating the System

Getting the right support starts with understanding what you're entitled to. Navigating the mental healthcare system can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone.

Veterans may access mental health treatment through:

- **Medicare:** A referral from your GP with a Mental Health Care Plan provides access to subsidised psychology sessions and assessments.
- **Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA):** Many veterans are eligible for mental health services funded by the DVA—sometimes for life—regardless of whether a condition is service-related.
- **Open Arms:** Free, confidential counselling and group programs for veterans and families.

At Monarch, we can help coordinate your referral, ensure you have the right documentation, and work with your GP or existing care providers. We also assist referring doctors by offering clear communication and outcome reports, ensuring veterans remain supported throughout treatment.

Understanding the system is the first step—reaching out makes all the difference.

Chapter 7: Your Next Step: Starting the Journey with Monarch

Whether you're a veteran, partner, GP, or support worker, taking the first step towards recovery can feel daunting—but we are here to guide you.

Getting Started with Monarch

- 1. Referral:** Speak to your GP to arrange a referral and Mental Health Care Plan. Alternatively, psychiatrists may refer directly.
- 2. Assessment:** Book a psychiatric or psychological assessment at your nearest Monarch Clinic.
- 3. Treatment Plan:** We'll develop a personalised plan, which may include therapy, medication, TMS, or integrated care.
- 4. Ongoing Support:** Treatment doesn't end at the door. We provide continuous monitoring and adapt your plan as needed.

We have multiple locations across NSW, Queensland, and Victoria, including clinics in Sydney and Melbourne. We also offer some services via telehealth for veterans in regional or remote areas.

Why Choose Monarch?

- Psychiatrist-led care model
- Individualised treatment for depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, and more
- TMS and other innovative therapies
- Fully accredited against national quality and safety standards
- Commitment to veteran wellbeing

Resources and Referrals

- **Monarch Mental Health Group:** <https://www.mmhg.com.au/> | Call 1300867888 to schedule your assessment.
- **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling:** 1800 011 046
- **Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA):** www.dva.gov.au
- **Lifeline (24/7 Crisis Support):** 13 11 14
- **GP Referral Checklist:** Download from our website

Treatments Available from Monarch Mental Health Group

At Monarch Mental Health Group, we offer a range of advanced, evidence-based treatments designed to support recovery in veterans living with mental health conditions. Each therapy is delivered with compassion, professionalism, and under strict clinical supervision to ensure safe and effective outcomes.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

TMS is a non-invasive brain stimulation technique that uses magnetic fields to activate specific areas of the brain associated with mood regulation. It has been proven effective in treating major depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and OCD—particularly in cases where other treatments have not worked. With minimal side effects and no need for sedation or hospitalisation, TMS is a safe option that fits easily into daily routines.

Deep TMS (dTMS)

An advanced form of TMS, deep TMS targets deeper brain structures and is especially helpful for those experiencing OCD or treatment-resistant depression. Monarch is proud to offer this innovative solution to veterans seeking alternatives to traditional therapies.

Nasal Spray For Depression

Nasal spray for depression is TGA-approved for individuals with treatment-resistant depression—those who haven't responded to at least two other antidepressants. It works by targeting the brain's glutamate system, helping to rapidly reset neural pathways involved in mood regulation.

Medication Assisted Psychotherapy (MAP)

Launched in 2023, Monarch's MAP program integrates guided psychotherapy sessions with specific medications designed to enhance emotional processing and trauma recovery. This cutting-edge approach is suited to individuals who have found limited success with conventional treatments and need a deeper, more supported therapeutic experience.

Each of these treatments is supported by protocols developed through the Monarch Research Institute. We believe in continuous learning, clinical innovation, and delivering care that's aligned with the latest research and real-world outcomes.

Our mental health professionals—including psychiatrists, psychologists, and nursing staff—work collaboratively to tailor treatments to each veteran's goals, history, and preferences.

Chapter 8: You're Not Alone: Support Is Within Reach

You've served your country with honour. Now it's time to take care of yourself. Mental health after military service is a journey, and you don't have to walk it alone. Monarch Mental Health Group is [here to support you](#) with compassion, expertise, and a clear pathway to recovery.

Contact us today and take the first step toward reclaiming your wellbeing.