



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR VETERANS' HEALTHCARE

Comprehensive care in one location



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Australia's first comprehensive care
centre offering specialist physical and
mental healthcare services for veterans
in one location at Concord Hospital.

CONCORD HOSPITAL IS A SPECIAL PLACE FOR AUSTRALIAN VETERANS

Since it opened in 1941 as a military hospital, Concord Repatriation General Hospital has continued to provide support and care for our nation's military and veteran community.

As part of the stage one hospital redevelopment announced by the NSW Government in 2017, there came an opportunity for Concord to once again lead the way in veterans' healthcare.

It is well documented that many Defence Force personnel face struggles when leaving the service and transitioning back to civilian life. Many do so with injuries, loss of limbs or mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), often coupled with the pressure of having a family to support.

Concord Hospital's commitment to ensuring the best possible long-term health and wellbeing outcomes for the men and women who serve our nation has inspired the model behind the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare. It aims to reduce the barriers veterans may face to seek help from health professionals by providing world-class, integrated care from a range of specialities, tailored to individual needs.

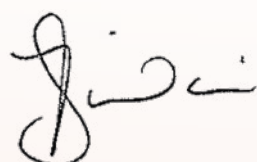
The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is a unique model – Australia's only comprehensive centre to provide specialist services in one location – filling an identified gap in the provision of veterans' healthcare services.

Veterans will be welcomed with their families and carers to set goals and develop a care plan to meet their needs, improve health and wellbeing and ensure there is ongoing support provided in their local communities.

The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is an acknowledgement to our past and a commitment to the future of veterans' wellbeing in Australia. Our community can be proud that Concord Repatriation General Hospital will continue to be the hospital of choice for the men and women who serve our nation.



Dr Teresa Anderson AM
 Chief Executive
 Sydney Local Health District



Dr Tim Sinclair
 Acting Director Operations
 Sydney Local Health District



Concord Repatriation General Hospital has a proud history of looking after our nation's military and veteran community.

The hospital stands on the grounds of the estate where Eadith Walker offered a home for tubercular servicemen returning home from WWI in 1915 and in 1917 established a camp for returned servicemen. Eadith Walker was made Commander and later a Dame of the British Empire for her war assistance.

In 1939, the site was identified for a military hospital. The 113th Australian General Hospital was designed and built in record time and admitted its first patients in March 1941.

When the main multi block was completed in 1942, the 2000-bed military hospital was one of the tallest buildings in Sydney and the largest hospital in the southern hemisphere.

Designed by Stephenson and Turner, the original hospital is considered architecturally outstanding and won the Sulman Award for Public Architecture in 1946.

After WWII the hospital continued to provide medical services for returned servicemen and women and was later renamed Concord Repatriation General Hospital, when it became part of the NSW public health system in 1993.

The campus architecture holds local heritage significance and is covered by a conservation management plan.

The tradition of caring for veterans has continued throughout Concord's history, with a Veterans' Day Centre providing therapeutic services to veterans and war widows, the ANZAC Research Institute and Kokoda Track Memorial, all located on campus.

Concord Hospital Redevelopment

Work is underway on a \$341.2 million redevelopment of Concord Hospital funded by the NSW Government.

The redevelopment will see construction of a new clinical services building on the hospital campus due for completion in 2021. A dedicated clinical area for the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is part of the redevelopment project scope.



Image: Concord Hospital stage one



Images: Concord Hospital 1940s-1970s



Australian Defence Forces

373 suicide deaths

among those who had at least 1 day of ADF service³

male suicide 18% higher

among ex-serving men compared to all Australian men²

suicide is 2.2x more common

for ex-serving men than all Australian men **under 30**

Footnotes

¹ 2016-17 ² 2002-16 ³ 2001-16

⁴ 2010 ADF Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study

58,200 AUSTRALIANS SERVING IN THE PERMANENT AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

54%

ADF members experienced **anxiety or alcohol use disorders** at some stage in their lifetime⁴

0.3%

of the Australian population aged 16 and over¹

About

5000

people leave the defence force every year

291,000 Australians are DVA clients

45 per cent are veterans' families¹

13%

of veterans were drinking at dangerous levels

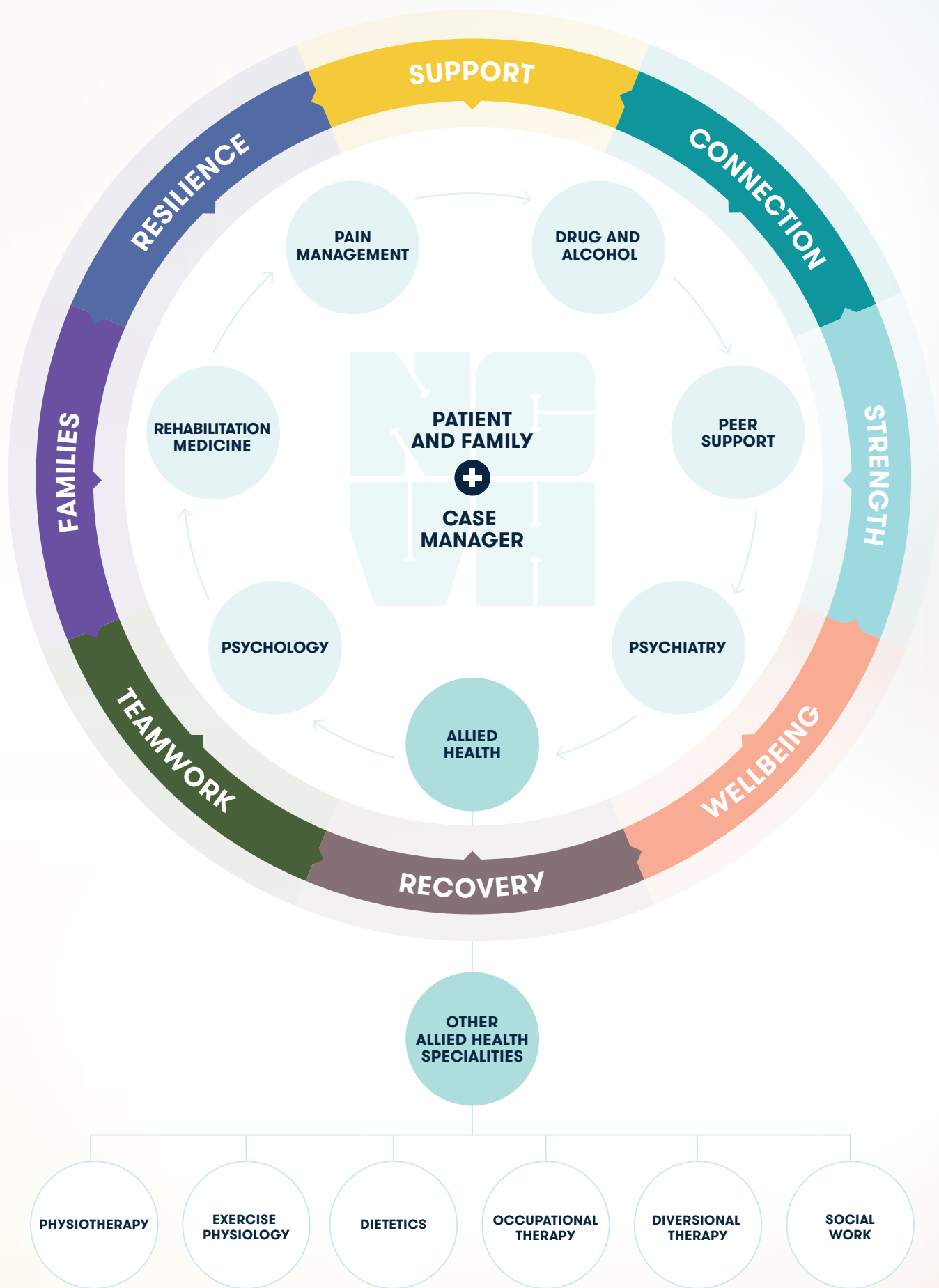
4x

Veterans are **4x** more likely to have an **alcohol disorder** compared with those still serving in the ADF

1 in 5

ADF members had experienced a **mental health disorder** in the previous 12 months⁴

MODEL OF CARE



VISION

To be the leaders in the provision of comprehensive care to achieve optimal physical and mental wellbeing and quality of life for our veterans.

Model of Care

The National Centre for Veterans’ Healthcare is an integrated care approach. Clients are not admitted to hospital but linked with a case manager with care provided by a team of health professionals working collaboratively.

Appointments will be scheduled with specialists to assess, manage, treat and support individual needs with family members invited to participate in care plans and access medical and social support programs.

Services

Combining the skills of specialist health professionals across:

- PSYCHOLOGY** **PSYCHIATRY** **PAIN MANAGEMENT**
- REHABILITATION MEDICINE** **PHYSIOTHERAPY**
- DRUG HEALTH** **EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGY** **DIETICIANS**
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS** **PEER SUPPORT**
- DIVERSIONAL THERAPISTS** **SOCIAL WORK**

Residential accommodation

The National Centre for Veterans’ Healthcare understands the important role of families and carers to support treatment and recovery.

To ensure the high quality clinical service is accessible to all veterans, residential hostel accommodation will be provided on site at Concord Hospital for those who travel from regional areas.

The accommodation will offer a relaxed non-clinical setting with family, twin and single rooms along with shared kitchen, lounge, laundry and recreational facilities including a children’s playground. It will be a safe space for veterans to stay together and share experiences and will be designed to promote comradery and support networks.

The 20-room hostel accommodation is funded with a \$6.7 million contribution from the Commonwealth Government.

support

Supporting veterans and their families to achieve the **best quality of life**

connection

Connecting veterans and their families to the best **services and treatments** to meet their needs

strength

Building strength through collaboration and **treatment goals**

wellbeing

Improving individual wellbeing by delivering safe and confidential clinical services

recovery

Regaining quality of life with a focus on **goal setting** and **support**

teamwork

Partnering with **veterans, families and local communities** on the road to recovery

families

Recognising the **importance of family** in the journey of recovery

resilience

Working with you to **build the capacity to recover** from difficulties

Sooner or later, some of these people will need help...



Colonel Professor Robert Lusby AM has witnessed what happens when people are uprooted from ordinary life and find themselves in a war zone.

The retired Australian Army surgeon served in Rwanda, East Timor and Bougainville and says many servicemen and women “don’t feel normal” when they return home.

“They’ve seen things and they’ve done things which are extraordinary and often they keep it in; it’s not easy to talk about,” Professor Lusby said.

As chair of the working party for the National Centre for Veterans’ Healthcare, Professor Lusby says transitioning to civilian life should be made a little easier by the establishment of a “one-stop-shop” model at Concord Hospital.

Professor Lusby, who was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2015 for his outstanding services to medicine, believes the Centre is both overdue and needed now more than ever.

“Part of our contract to our servicemen and women is we look after them, both when they go away and when they come back,” he said.

There are about 60,000 Australian service men and women who have served over the last two decades, including as peacekeepers, in Rwanda, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Solomon Islands.

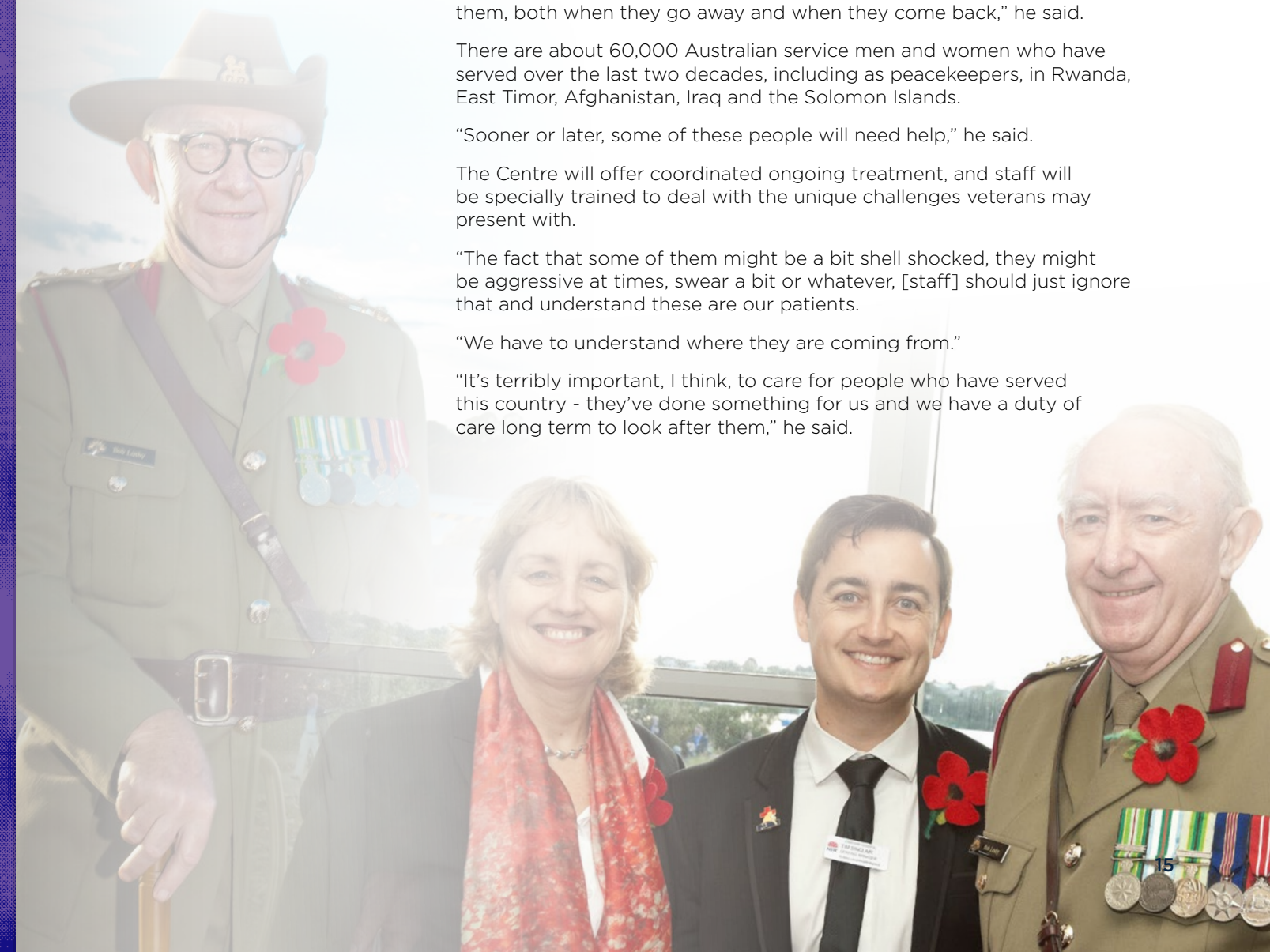
“Sooner or later, some of these people will need help,” he said.

The Centre will offer coordinated ongoing treatment, and staff will be specially trained to deal with the unique challenges veterans may present with.

“The fact that some of them might be a bit shell shocked, they might be aggressive at times, swear a bit or whatever, [staff] should just ignore that and understand these are our patients.

“We have to understand where they are coming from.”

“It’s terribly important, I think, to care for people who have served this country - they’ve done something for us and we have a duty of care long term to look after them,” he said.



Brad Copelin has left the battlefield of war but he's still fighting an enemy.

Only this time, the enemy is from within.



Now 48, Brad joined the Army when he was 17 after graduating from high school in Brisbane, Queensland.

He rose through the ranks and was deployed several times.

He was involved in border protection operations, became the Military Police Commander in the Solomon Islands, and served with the Australian Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was his last overseas deployment. He returned home to Sydney where he led advanced military police training and then took a position at the Defence Force's Corrective Establishment – its detention facility at Holsworthy Barracks.

In 2011, after 24 years of service, the former Warrant Officer was medically discharged. He had physical injuries and had sought medical help for mental health issues.

"I was lost. I had no idea what I could do. I was trying to fend for myself. I was struggling," Brad said.

Returning to civilian life was hard and he wrestled with a loss of identity.

"For most of my adult life I've been in uniform. There's discipline. There's routines. And then all of a sudden you're out and you lose that support network.

"To go from a position of responsibility, having troops under your command... from when I was 22 years old to when I left at 41 years old... it's a big loss.

"I went from being a career soldier to being unemployed. I'd never ever been unemployed in my life. Back to being dad to two young children and being 'Mr Mum' because I wasn't allowed to work. And the loss of identity is huge," he said.

Being unemployed and unemployable exacerbated his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and led to anxiety and depression. For two years, he spent most of his days in bed at home.

He had graphic flashbacks and nightmares. Sometimes a noise, smell or taste would trigger a memory.

Brad became hyper-vigilant – constantly on alert for any potential threats – and was on an emotional rollercoaster: angry one minute and dissolved into tears the next.

It affected his family – his wife and two children Nardia, now 12, and her younger sister Livia, who's almost nine.

"My daughters had to learn to live with a happy dad, a crying dad, an angry dad. Sometimes all within 25 minutes.

"They know more about veterans' mental health than most kids will ever know," he said.

Over the past few years, with the support of his family and friends, and with help from his doctors, his journey towards recovery has been on-going.

"Two months ago, I had a breakdown. It all just started to fall apart. I'd taken too much on. I was just not coping and it was affecting my family too much. I put my hand-up and my psychiatrist was a great help.

"I often use the term 'work-in-progress'. And that's what I think I am," he said.

Brad hopes to make the transition from life in military to the civilian world easier for other veterans and their families and has taken an active role in veterans' welfare organisations.

He's been appointed the Veterans' Advisor for the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare (NCVH) at Concord Hospital.

"I'm passionate about helping others. The mateship and leadership [that comes with being a member of the ADF] continues out of uniform. We all have a connection because we have all served in the military."

He views his position at the Centre as being a veteran's advocate.

"My role is to be a voice for the veterans and their families. For all of those who have served and the current and future generation of veterans," he said.

Brad says his fellow veterans are pleased the Centre will offer streamlined access to services and treatment programs in one place – with many having experienced being "bounced around" from one organisation to the next.

"The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is going to be the pinnacle for veterans' healthcare in this country.

"It's virtually a one-stop-shop. They [veterans] can see a nurse, see a doctor [and] go through all the different treatment programs.

"That is a huge change to the way we have been looking after the healthcare of veterans for a long time," Brad said.

And the support that'll be offered to veteran's partners and their children is key.

"Too often, the family is forgotten about... That's one of their [a partner's] biggest complaints. That all the effort is for the partner who served... and that they're forgotten about.

"They'll know they can seek the help [at the Centre] as well. Their role is just as important as the person who serves and goes overseas. Because, they're the one that stays behind and does everything to allow them to do that.

"It's a shame that they are often forgotten but here [at the Centre] they won't be," he said.

He's full of praise for those behind the concept of the NCVH and the team at Concord Hospital working to bring it to fruition.

"I'm surrounded by people who care and want to help and that's brilliant."

Reflecting on his own journey, Brad wished the Centre had already been built.

"If this centre was open then [when I was discharged from the army], I would have been able to walk in and go 'Help. This is me. This is what's happening. Help me.'

"Saying the word 'help' is hard for a lot of veterans to do.

"But, with a centre like this it's going to encourage them to do that. To seek the help. It's going to encourage families to seek help," he said.

"This is a centre that focuses on the welfare of veterans. Families and spouses should be excited"





Photo by: @SaltyDingo / Invictus Games Sydney 2018



Following the loss of her beloved husband, Gwen Cherne became a leading advocate for the **increased role of families and carers** in the treatment and recovery of veterans.

Sergeant Peter Jon Café of Second Commando Regiment took his own life in February 2017 following a decades-long career that saw him deployed to war zones in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The couple met in Afghanistan, where American-born Gwen was working in international development, and moved to Australia to marry and start a family.

Peter had a stroke while in Iraq in 2012 and struggled with mental health issues during his recovery at home.

But he hid his struggles from the Army, afraid he might lose his job if his superiors knew about his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety.

Since Peter's devastating suicide, Gwen has channelled her grief into advocating for the rights of veterans' families and carers.

Gwen says she would have been more able to help Peter access the help he needed had she known more about his condition and the services available to veterans.

Veterans are typically unlikely to seek help for mental health issues because of the stigma attached. And in Peter's case, much of his work in Special Forces was confidential, and being unable to discuss his experiences caused tension and feelings of loneliness, Gwen said.

Now a member-director of the War Widows Guild of NSW, Gwen is determined to inform other families of their rights and entitlements during a service member's deployment, as well as post-deployment, a particularly difficult time for many veterans.

"How can we make sure we're supporting the veteran if we're not including the family?" Gwen said.

"The family is ultimately going to be the one caring for the veteran so the family needs to know what they're dealing with.

"And on the other hand, the Defence Force needs to understand the family dynamic, and if you don't engage with the family, you can't fully grasp where the support is needed."

As an Invictus Games Sydney 2018 Clubs NSW Ambassador, Gwen spoke publicly of her determination to raise awareness of mental health among veterans and their families.

She made worldwide headlines when she was enveloped in a warm hug by Prince Harry atop the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Harry, the Duke of Sussex, had asked Gwen about Peter, and they talked for some time about the reality facing veterans and their families when service men and women transition back to civilian life.

Some people asked why, as a war widow, she wanted to be involved in the Games, but for Gwen, she will always consider her family to be a military family.

Peter's eldest son Tom, 20, is a private in the Australian Army and is currently stationed in Townsville. Tom and Prince Harry spoke about suicide prevention during a reception hosted by the Prime Minister at Kirribilli House during the Royal tour.

Gwen is raising their youngest children Emily, 6, and Lachlan, 4, as a single mother while taking on

the role of Widows, Veterans and Families Advisor to the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Gwen said by including families in the care planning and treatment, the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare at Concord Hospital will fill an important gap in the treatment and recovery of veterans.

"It's absolutely wonderful that we're starting to recognise that the family must be included."

"How can we make sure we're supporting the veteran if we're not including the family?"

GWEN CHERNE

MEMBER-DIRECTOR, WAR WIDOWS GUILD OF NSW



Afghanistan war veteran Damien Thomlinson is grateful the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is being created, because it'll offer streamlined access to services for contemporary veterans who have served in active and peacekeeping missions.

Damien was 24 when he became an elite Commando in the Australian Defence Force.

He was on night patrol with the 2nd Commando regiment in Afghanistan in 2009 when his unit drove over an improvised bomb.

He lost parts of both his arms and legs as a result of the explosion.

"My right arm was wrecked pretty badly. So was my left. My right leg was taken off above the knee. My left [leg] below the knee. I had a closed head injury and a few other things," he said.

When he returned to Australia for treatment, Damien was frustrated about the lack of coordinated rehabilitation services for seriously injured veterans.

"The rehab was extensive. It was a long process that I had to go through when I got back to Australia.


"Nothing is ever a perfect system.

"But I know with my [situation] the left hand wasn't talking to the right hand... having to find services... find different products and find different things and you think the entire time 'How easy it would be if everything was in one spot'," he said.

Damien is thankful that his own experience may, in a small way, have contributed to a change in approach and that contemporary veterans, who've served in locations including Rwanda, East Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Solomon Islands, will benefit.

"To find out that there's a hospital like Concord that's putting all those services in the one spot making that system easier is so re-assuring to me for the future.

"I hope you can understand how much it means to me to have a centralised service, centralised skills in the one spot," he said.



Having left the Army three years ago, Tommy Pulliene says he has a good balance in life now.

But he didn't always.

The former Corporal and father of three served in the Australia Army for 18 years, moving around Australia four times and completing three tours in East Timor, two in Solomon Islands and one in Iraq.

Despite suffering injuries from a parachuting accident in 2004, which later caused damage to his spine and shoulder requiring a series of operations, he loved the Army.

"I lost the use of my right side after a rugby game one day and was told my arm was probably not going to work again," he said.

During his two year rehabilitation to learn to use his arm again, Tommy was in Wagga Wagga and his kids with his ex-wife in Sydney. He said having family around was part of the healing process.

"I made the drive to see them every two weeks for one and half years because I couldn't bear to not have my kids around who are so important to me."

Diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, Tommy describes his discharge from the Army as going through hell.

"I was bounced from hospital to hospital, physio to physio – it felt like they were trying to kill me with medication. One doctor was not talking to another.

"The medical system is different. I didn't know how to make a doctor's appointment.

"And you're lonely. You lose all your friends. It was really hard to deal with."

Since his discharge and with the support of his partner Melissa, a psychologist, Tommy worked hard to set goals and maintain his mental health.

Relocating to Newcastle to build new lives, they mapped out their personal life, joining clubs, gyms, doing charity work and even buying a local kayaking business alongside his management of a security firm.

"The more we are exposed to, the more resilient we will be.

"Sport is one way of rehabilitating into civilian environment. We can't stay insulated in the veteran environment always."

Tommy can now reflect on the experience of transitioning to civilian life, seeing many struggle to get help and be independent from Defence.

"Your sense of belonging takes a big hit – you need to chase a sense of belonging again.

"The core beliefs and ethos from Defence are so important for veterans – they will always be there for each other. But the best thing veterans can do for the veterans community is look after themselves first.

"If you're not one of the problems you can be one of the solutions.

Tommy says the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare at Concord Hospital is a much-needed services for veterans to be able to look after themselves.

"Getting people looked after in one place is an amazing idea. I would like to go to less funerals for my mates.

"I believe in the motivated veteran – if we can motivate people to be motivated – we are going to save more lives."

Veterans have contributed to our safety as a nation and it's our responsibility to look after them while they are serving and afterwards too.

LIL VRKLEVSKI, DIRECTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT



Get in touch

If you would like to find out more about the planning and development of the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare please email SLHD-NCVHconcord@health.nsw.gov.au or call **1800 252 100**. For the latest updates, visit us online at ncvhconcord.com.au

Find us on

  @NCVHConcord



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