

24 October 2017

DOCTORS AND VETERANS BREAK DOWN HEALTH BARRIERS

RSL Queensland and AMA Queensland have joined forces to improve the healthcare of veterans across the state.

The alliance of the two peak organisations, announced in Townsville today as part of Veterans' Health Week, will provide former servicemen and women with access to GPs who have served in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) or who have experience in treating veteran-related health issues.

RSL Queensland Veteran Services Manager Rob Skoda said the face of veterans was changing and it was important to keep pace with their health issues and needs.

"There are stereotypes of veterans as being elderly gentlemen but this is not the reality," Mr Skoda said.

"More than half of all veterans who approached RSL Queensland for assistance last year were aged in their 40s.

"And we know that tinnitus, sensory-neural hearing loss and degenerative spinal discs are among the top five most common health problems affecting service personnel when they return homeⁱ, but we tend to hear mostly about mental health conditions."

Apart from 170,000 veterans, Queensland was also home to 21,500 current serving men and women with the total military community, including families of ADF personnel, estimated to be 496,600.

AMA Queensland North Area Representative and Townsville GP, Dr Michael Clements, who served in the Royal Australian Air Force for 13 years, said access to RSL Queensland-funded veteran health research and training programs would ensure he remained up to date with health issues and treatments affecting the ADF community.

"Because of my military service, I am keen to support ex-service personnel as well as family members of those who are currently serving," said Dr Clements, who remained in the RAAF Specialist Reserve.

"I see a lot of veterans with musculoskeletal injuries from their service as well as those who are struggling mentally to readjust to civilian life."

Townsville veteran Terry Aldred, who served in the Australian Navy for 23 years, said his GP had helped him through tough times after he was discharged in 2001.

"I thought I was fine, but I ended up having a nervous breakdown," Mr Aldred said.

"My GP understands my personal military experience so he has been able to really help me get back on track."

Mr Skoda said RSL Queensland would provide details on its website of doctors with experience in treating veterans as well as those who have served in the ADF.

“Veterans are often reluctant to open up with doctors who have no experience in what it’s like to be deployed to a war zone or to have to face the challenges of returning to a civilian life,” Mr Skoda said.

“Through this affiliation, AMA Queensland doctors and RSL Queensland will work together to ensure veterans seeking help can access an experienced GP or specialist early so they can get on with leading happy, fulfilling lives.”

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ⁱ https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/Top20_Mar2017.pdf

AMA Queensland

AMA Queensland is the state’s peak medical body which exists to advance the professional interests of doctors and the health of the community. It is an independent organisation representing more than 6,200 doctors – from residents and registrars to public and private specialists and general practitioners.