

Intergenerational Health Effects of Service in the Military

Research into the health of veterans families, provides a very significant opportunity to understand and improve people's lives. Most people are aware that over past generations Australian armed forces service personnel have undertaken a committed role on behalf of their country. What has not been understood is that in many cases there has been a very significant impact on their family's physical and mental health, and the quality of their lives.

It is not before time that the Australian Government and community obtained a complete understanding.

While in opposition, Labor, (now the Rudd Government) agreed to follow through with research into the intergenerational health of the sons and daughters of veterans.

Some in the veteran community have said, "just leave it to the researchers and let them do their jobs". (no stakeholder involvement).

Regardless of which scientific organization undertakes the research, it is vital that the group established to oversee / manage / provide direction to the research, has multiple representation of stakeholders.

Effective representation is vital; not to undertake or direct the research methodologies, nor to hamper

the scientific work; but to ensure the best interest of veterans sons and daughters is assured.

There will be challenges which only enthusiastic representation can provide.

This includes understanding the affect that sampling and data collection have on the potential results that may be obtained. For example, without an adequate sample size, less common health problems cannot be established.

Several ex service organizations have been giving consideration to who may provide the representation. The previous Minister, Bruce Billson would not give any indication of the make up of the representation, except to say, that it will include a suitably qualified person.

There will be difficulties and challenges, such as obtaining the necessary veteran family numbers to guarantee a successful study outcome, establishing veteran community support, and having an effective communication process so that the veteran community feel like participants, not 'guinea pigs'.

For discussion purposes stakeholder representation includes:

- Representing the actual interests of the stakeholder rather than the individual priorities;
- Having a communications strategy and mechanisms for consultation;
- Maintaining a working relationship with all parties;
- Persuading the forum that the information relating to process and methodology be shared amongst the

veteran community, and not held captive by the DVA. Stakeholders need to understand the progress and constraint. There is a strong tendency for the DVA to restrict information citing personal information is confidential. However most information does not involve personal information. In the past there has been a practice of producing a 'special' set of minutes for the general community.

- Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with other members of the forum, and the ex service community, focusing on the future for sons and daughters of veterans.
- Being aware that researchers, scientific experts, and stakeholders all have individual expertise which may assist with the process and final outcome.
- Realizing that a research study is not just doing a literature review, collecting data, asking questions and drawing some conclusions. Each of these components has degrees of focus and completeness. The ability to produce policy and establish intervention strategies is also an important consideration.
- Have sound reasoning and analysis skills:
 - critically appraise complex reasoning
 - effectively defend opinions with solid arguments
 - write clear, well-organized argumentative prose
 - think clearly
 - make rational judgments.
 - understand the principles of argument

\$13.5M was committed to this research into the Intergenerational health effects of service in the military.

Professor Hedley Peach has supported the importance of undertaking this study and has advised government, advised the veteran community, and generally provided a very significant amount of his personal time to pursuing family research into the health of veteran's sons and daughters; he has written and published papers on the matter.

Dr Roderick Bain, as a member of the veteran community, indicated that he also believes it is imperative that we have participatory representation in the consultation process and the research study, from its inception to conclusion. This would include involvement and representation on any steering committee, reference group, or advisory committee. The proposed scope of the study has been widened to include East Timor personnel and to also include a prospective study into troops who are yet to see service abroad.

The Minister for Veterans Affairs, Mr. Alan Griffin, is very enthusiastic to introduce the Governments policy and has said that he will be working with the veteran community to ensure stakeholders are actively involved with the health study.

COVVHS is very appreciative of Minister Griffins continued collaboration.

David Matheson, President, COVVHS

