

# Improving transition for ADF members and their families

The Joint Transition Authority (JTA) was announced by the Australian Government in October 2020, based on a recommendation in the Productivity Commission report, *A Better Way to Support Veterans*. The JTA's purpose is to better prepare and support Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families as they transition from military to civilian life. Though part of the Department of Defence, the JTA is partnering with DVA and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC).

The JTA is currently reviewing the transition system to identify where improvements can be made, including opportunities to better integrate services and share information. Part of that process has involved consultation with ex-service organisations, state and territory governments, academia, industry, and above all, veterans and their families.

To date, one of the key issues the JTA has identified and addressed is the systematic sharing of transition data across Defence, DVA and CSC. Further, a new Defence Transition Manual is under development. This will assist officers involved in a member's transition to navigate the transition process within Defence. This will enable decisions that better support transitioning members and their families. Connection points with DVA and CSC will also be included.

The JTA's Director General is Brigadier Wade Stothart DSC AM CSC who has previously overseen the Army's workforce generation systems, including transitions and employability classifications.

Brigadier Stothart points out that while the majority of veterans do transition well, it's important to recognise that some do not and the JTA is looking at ways to improve the transition experience for all members and their families but with a focus on those who may need additional support.

Since taking on the job last year, he has noticed **four key aspects** of the transition process that he sees as critical in supporting a successful transition.

'The first is early preparation,' he says. 'If you leave everything to the last minute, there's a lot to get through. You need to start early, **develop a deliberate plan**, and then gradually complete all of the preparatory activities that will contribute to a smooth and successful transition.



Director General of the Joint Transition Authority, Brigadier Wade Stothart DSC AM CSC

'The second thing would be to make sure you have time to do it. It's one thing to start early and get a number of things done, but you will need dedicated time focused on your transition. We recognise the importance of the command chain in supporting transitions and, specifically, allowing members time to complete all the necessary transition requirements.

**Involvement of family is another key consideration.** Often it is not just the service person who's going through transition; their families transition as well. Families are a protective factor for the health and wellbeing of the service person and vice versa.

'Finally, we need to demystify military skills to help with accreditation and education so they are easily transferable to civilian employers or academic institutions.'

Brigadier Stothart adds that for personnel leaving the ADF, there's not only the transition process but also the **emotional aspects** to be considered.

'Major changes have occurred in the transition space since 2017,' he says. 'Prior to that, support was granted on the basis of your length of service. Now, it's a needs-based approach. Some of the **most vulnerable cohorts of veterans are those under 30** who have served for less than 4 years. Anecdotally, we also understand that **3 to 4 years after** an apparently successful transition, some members may lack a sense of purpose. But if we know these things, we can prepare people for them or identify ways to address the issue.

'Everyone's transition will be different. There are some impressive support services and programs available within Government and by ex-service organisations. What is best for individuals depends

on their needs. We want a transition system that builds self-agency and independence.'

While many aspects of the transition process are mandatory, some are not. The JTA is considering what additional components of transition preparation should be mandatory. Already in place is the ability for those who have transitioned to reach back into the ADF for support up until 24 months post their transition date. Brigadier Stothart is supportive of an overlap in services between Defence and DVA as long as they are not duplicative.

'We view this as a great opportunity to work together to continue to improve the experience of transition for veterans and their families,' says Carly Partridge, an assistant secretary at DVA who works closely with the JTA. 'We know this can be a challenging time for some ADF members and it is rightly our priority to do all we can to make this an easier and simpler experience, and empower them to successfully transition to civilian life.'

**Key to a good transition is meaningful employment or engagement.** Brigadier Stothart says. 'So not just a job but the right job or some other kind of meaningful engagement. And that's just one of 5 or 6 factors that contribute to our wellness. Others include health, **social connection, relationships, financial security** and housing. The really good work that's going on now is thinking about our lifetime responsibility for wellness of all our veterans.

'But it's also about **culture within the chain** of command to support people, and to adopt a **long-term view of caring for people.**

'We are working hard to engage with and involve families more. We need to take a **broad definition of families.** It's not just the partner and children. How do we keep on educating families on services available to them specifically, and how do we let them know how they can speak to us if they need to? It makes me think about opportunities where we can, as Defence, directly engage with families.

'Whether they've had a smooth journey is another question, but ultimately most veterans move into civilian life and are **productive, capable, contributing members** of their communities. However, some have difficulty and some feel they are not well supported. Quite rightly, they have raised these concerns. While much has been done to improve transition, we know there is much more to do.

'I think our veterans have tremendous skills and experiences that would allow them to continue to make an **invaluable contribution to our communities and nation.**

Anyone wishing to engage with the JTA can email [jta.engagement@defence.gov.au](mailto:jta.engagement@defence.gov.au)