

Diverse Needs: Veterans and War Widows

Veterans are men and women who served in the Australian Defence Forces, often in war or dangerous events. More than 250,000 veterans are over 65 years, 2.3% are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and 22,500 female veterans. There are over 30,000 War Widows and Widowers, partners of veterans who have died in war or due to related illnesses.

Experience of disadvantage

Veterans and War Widows(ers) have endured stress from life-threatening events causing physical and mental trauma. Military culture may have lasting wellbeing effects. War Widows(ers) faced long periods alone, frequent moves and sole parenting responsibility. Loss of their partner to war brings deep grief mixed with feelings of duty and sacrifice.

Complex overlaps

Poor mental health and grief can affect both groups. Some, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans and widows(ers), face other health and social challenges. Lack of understanding of their service may add to isolation. Many war widows(ers) were carers facing hardships, emotional, physical, and financial strain.

The impact on end-of-life care

Both groups value self-reliance, preferring each other's support rather than seeking services. Ageing brings limited choices and emotional distress at the end of their lives. Services need to be aware of the trauma they have faced and ensure privacy, safety, and a sense of control.

Find out more about palliative [care for veterans](#) on CareSearch.

Use this Planning Ahead [Planning Ahead Kit](#) by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

