



AASW

.....
Australian Association
of Social Workers

***Scope of Social Work Practice:
Australian Defence Force (ADF)
Service Members, Veterans, and
their Families***

March 2016

© Australian Association of Social Workers
Level 7, 14-20 Blackwood St,
North Melbourne, VIC 3051
PO Box 2008,
Royal Melbourne Hospital, VIC 3050

Enquiries regarding this document can be
directed to:

Senior Manager, Policy & Advocacy:

Stephen Brand

Email: stephen.brand@asw.asn.au

Phone: 02 6199 5000

AASW Chief Executive Officer:

Glenys Wilkinson

Email: ceo@asw.asn.au

Introduction

The Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) *Scope of Social Work Practice* series provides an overview of the role, scope and contribution of social work practice. The aim of this document is to highlight in a concise, accessible and informative manner the crucial role and services that social workers provide and that employers and clients can expect.

The AASW ***Scope of Social Work Practice: ADF Service Members, Veterans and their Families*** document provides an overview of the role, scope, contribution and evidence base of social work in this practice setting. Social workers provide services to the Australian military and veteran communities in specialist settings such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Department of Defence.

Millions of Australians, including those who have served, their families and communities, have been affected by war and military operations throughout Australia's history: World War One; World War Two; wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan; a multitude of UN peacekeeping operations since 1946; and border protection. Military and veteran communities are diverse and encompass all age groups, gender identities, geographic location, abilities, religions, political affiliations, and social, economic, health/genetic or relationship status. The military has its own culture which governs how veterans and the military view their role in life. Social workers respect others' worldviews within a framework of social justice, human rights, and culturally competent practice.

The number of Australians connected to our military and veteran communities is multi-layered and significant. As a case in point, there are 85,000 current serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel (including Reservists). More than half of this group are under 29 years of age and over 50% have children. When immediate and extended family members are included there are around one million Australians in this community.

The social work profession

The social work profession is committed to **maximising the wellbeing of individuals and society**. We consider that individual and societal wellbeing are underpinned by socially inclusive communities that emphasise principles of **social justice and respect for human dignity and human rights**, including the right to freedom from intimidation and exclusion.

Drawing on theories of social work, social sciences, psychology, anthropology, humanities and Indigenous knowledge, social workers focus on the interface between the individual and the environment and recognise the impact of social, economic and cultural factors on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing, and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Social work is a **tertiary-qualified profession** recognised nationally and internationally. The AASW is the key professional body representing social workers in Australia and is responsible for the accreditation of social work university programs.

The academic qualifications that members of the AASW are required to hold are: a **Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Social Work with Honours** or a **Social Work Qualifying Master's degree**.

The curriculum provides entry-level professional social work education addressing the knowledge, skills and values that can be applied across the diverse range of practice settings, fields of practice and methods of social work practice, and includes an extensive period of field education.

Graduates of AASW-accredited social work courses are eligible for membership of the AASW.

Click [here](#) for a full list of AASW accredited courses.

In addition, accredited **Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs)** (accredited by the AASW) are highly skilled and well positioned to contribute to the ongoing development and implementation of health and welfare services across the military. The AASW has an existing co-regulatory arrangement with the Australian Government, whereby the AASW is the appointed authority on behalf of the Government to assess social workers' eligibility to provide mental health services and focused psychological strategies under Medicare as well as Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) and other mental health programs provided in private practice and primary care settings.

The AASW also credentials '**Accredited Social Workers**'. When commissioning the services of an Accredited **Mental Health Social Worker** or an **Accredited Social Worker**, an agency can be certain that they are engaging a professionally qualified social worker who is accountable to the AASW Code of Ethics, has committed to and completed a minimum amount of continuing professional development and undertakes a minimum standard and amount of professional supervision.

Experienced social workers are well qualified to provide supervision to other allied health professionals as well as social workers: many undertake additional courses in the provision of professional supervision. Social workers may undertake post-graduate specialisation in the fields of mental health, family and couples therapy, management, addiction and trauma and other specialist areas.

In the international literature, the field of practice with the military and veteran communities is described as 'military social work'. There is a growing interest in developing

this field of practice in Australia. In addition to civilian social workers, the USA and Canadian forces employ uniformed military officers who serve in the military. This is not the case in Australia where civilian social workers are employed.

Role of social work

Social work with ADF Service Members, veterans and their families is a large area of practice. Regardless of context, social workers working with this diverse population focus on the preservation and improvement of psychological and social functioning. This is paralleled with a holistic and contextual understanding of a client's experience, and a commitment to self-determination, dignity and respect.

Department of Defence

Department of Defence social workers are employed in a diverse range of sub-settings including child and family support, community development, mental health, rehabilitation, research and evaluation, management, and policy.

The Defence Community Organisation (DCO) is an organisation in the Department of Defence that employs social workers who provide services in relation to: critical incident and casualty support including case management of funerals and the support of family members and other close associates of Defence members who die or are injured while in service; absence from home support; self reliance support via a community capacity-building approach, which aims to promote good mental health and wellbeing; command management and policy, which educates ADF commanders (leaders) about family needs; and, mobility support, which acknowledges relocation as an inherent part of military life.

DCO employs civilian social workers located near a number of ADF facilities around Australia.

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Social workers are employed in the Veterans' and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) as mental health counsellors, care coordinators, first line contact officers, managers, researchers, and policymakers.

DVA provides mental health counselling to ex-ADF members and veterans through the DVA allied mental health program. Accredited Mental Health Social Workers registered with Medicare also provide social work services, such as complex case management, through the allied health program.

DVA provides a social work service as the point of contact for veterans who wish to make a compensation claim or access health treatment for an injury. The social work role provides an initial needs assessment, risk assessment, and referral as required.

DVA provides community mental health services through VVCS. Social workers are employed and contracted (through their private practice) to provide counselling, assessment, case management, and psychosocial group programs for veterans, their partners and children.

Hospital in-patient and out-patient programs

After World War Two repatriation hospitals were established in Australia to provide services to injured veterans. Social workers played a significant role in these hospital services. Hospital services have evolved over the decades and most States have a specialist program available to members of the military and veteran communities, particularly focusing on the mental health conditions experienced by this client group (e.g. trauma including PTSD, major depression, substance use disorders). Social workers provide discharge planning, case management, referral and support services for family members, as well as treatment services.

Mainstream services

Social workers practice with this population across other sectors including non-government, State and Local Government agencies, and private practice across the full range of programs: aged care (older veterans), health and mental health, income maintenance, disability, homelessness and housing, child and family, legal, justice, crisis services, and schools.

Scope of social work practice: ADF personnel, veterans and their families

When practicing in the military setting, social workers draw on a broad range of biological, psychological, life course and social theories to form their assessments and interventions, and evaluate their practice. Social work assessments range from targeted and brief specific-needs analyses through to comprehensive holistic psychosocial and risk assessments of the full range of social and psychological needs, strengths and stressors; including assessments of family relationships and circumstances. These assessments underpin targeted and needs-based interventions to address the social and emotional issues that are impacting on the individual's health and wellbeing. A social worker's approach to assessment is influenced by their use of specific theories and is based on their professional training and experience.

Family-sensitive practice underpins **all** social work interventions.

The **scope of practice** includes:

Assessment

- Bio-psychosocial assessment
- Risk assessment
- Specialised mental health assessment

- Assessment reports for ADF decision-makers (Command)

Intervention and Treatment Planning

- Evidence-informed counselling for individuals, families and couples
- Psycho-education focused group programs
- Treatment for mental health problems, grief, loss and bereavement, trauma, depression, anxiety and substance use disorders
- Services for psycho-social issues: parenting, anger management, family and intimate partner violence, homelessness, unemployment, rehabilitation from injury or illness
- Adjustment to injury/illness/disability and associated lifestyle changes through transition from the military to civilian life
- Crisis and suicide intervention
- Case Formulation and Treatment Planning

Case management and service coordination

- Coordinating formal and informal support networks and facilitating referral pathways

Education and resources

- Assisting in the navigation of military health and welfare systems
- Providing psycho-education in relation to alcohol and other drugs, mental health, suicide awareness, trauma, military-induced separations (deployment), and resilience

Advocacy

- Providing information for clients to be self-advocates and referral to DVA advocates (e.g., veteran compensation). Social workers also advocate for change at organisational and policy levels

Policy and research

- Developing policy, engaging in research and publishing in peer reviewed journals.

Contribution of social work

Social work with this client group focuses on the preservation and/or enhancement of functioning and of quality of life. With the focus on holistic care and the ability to consider the complexity involved from various perspectives, social workers offer a unique and valuable contribution in this field by providing appropriate and targeted services to meet the multidimensional needs of service members, veterans and their families. Social work assessments and interventions are not only of great benefit to the client, but to the decision-making capacities of other professionals. Therefore, social workers are regularly involved in multidisciplinary teams, especially when interventions are impacted by complex social, psychological, family and institutional dynamics.

Social workers strive to understand the unique culture of the military that values unit cohesion, teamwork, duty, honour, integrity, loyalty, respect, personal courage, and self-sacrifice. This enables social workers to recognise the potential risk and protective factors among the many subgroups and subcultures in the military and veteran community.

Social workers contribute in direct practice to administrative and policy roles. Today's military and their families in particular have had to manage a complex array of bio-psychosocial issues as a consequence of deployments alone: the impact of Traumatic Brain Injury due to

Improvised Explosive Devices; exposure to death and injury such as PTSD; the constant danger of not knowing who the enemy is; family separations and the new technologies for communication; suicide; and, evidence that intimate partner violence is higher than civilian families.

The AASW values the contribution of the military, veterans, and their families and notes the contribution of social work to enhancing their quality of life.

Conclusion

Social work in Australia has a long history with the military going back to World War Two and the commencement of the social work profession. As members of the multidisciplinary team, social work's focus is broad. It provides psychosocial services and treatment; develops and implements policies and programs that enhance the quality of life for serving members, veterans and their families; recognises the environmental factors that create and lead to challenges for service members and families such as deployment, relocation, exposure to combat, and significant life events; contributes to policy, prevention programs and convening groups. Social workers adhere to a Code of Ethics and best practice and policy principles of the profession.

Evidence informing practice

Books

Beder, J. (Ed.) (2012). *Advances in social work practice with the military*. Routledge, New York.

Blaisure, K., Saathoff-Wells, T., Pereira, A., MacDermid Wadsworth, S. & Dombro, A. (2015). *Serving Military Families: Theories, Research, and Application*. Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.

Daley, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Social work practice in the military*. The Haworth Press, New York.

Martin, J. A., Rosen, L. N., & Sparacino, L. R. (2000). *The military family: A practice guide for human service providers*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.

Rubin, A., Weiss, E. & Coll, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of military social work*, John Wiley and Sons, New Jersey.

Key Journals

There are no specific military social work journals. Social workers are well-published in mainstream social work and other journals.

Health Social Work

Social Work

Families in Society

Armed Forces and Society

Journal of Military Psychology

Military Medicine

Australian Resources & References

Siebler, P. (2015). **'Down under': Support for military families from an Australian perspective.** In R. Moelker, M. Andres, G. Bowen and P. Manigart. (Eds.), *Military families and war in the 21st century: Comparative perspectives*. Routledge, New York, pp. 287-301.

Siebler, P. & Goddard, C. (2014). **Parents' perspectives of their children's reactions to an Australian military deployment.** *Children Australia*, 39, pp. 17-24.

Siebler, P. (2009). **'Military people won't ask for help': Experiences of Deployment of Australian Defence Force Personnel, their Families, and Implications for Social Work.** Monash University, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, PhD.



AASW

**Australian Association
of Social Workers**

T 02 6199 5000

F 02 6199 5099

E ceo@asw.asn.au

Level 7, 14-20 Blackwood St North Melbourne, VIC 3051

Postal Address

PO Box 2008, Royal Melbourne Hospital, VIC 3050

Incorporated in the ACT

ACN 008 576 010 / ABN 93 008 576 010