





# About Defence Families of Australia

Established in 1986, Defence Families of Australia (DFA) is the national advocacy body for Defence families. We exist to ensure their needs and experiences are reflected in policies, programs, and decision-making.

Ministerially appointed delegates located near garrison areas ensures an on-the-ground presence, enabling us to stay closely connected to the realities of Defence family life. By listening, engaging, and elevating the issues that matter most, we can accurately elevate the day-to-day experiences of families. These insights are developed and presented to senior Defence leaders, including the Minister for Defence Personnel (MINDP) and the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF).

Our advocacy spans a diverse range of issues including housing, education, partner employment, family wellbeing, transition, and the daily impacts of Defence life. While our roots trace back to the 1986 Hamilton Report, our focus is firmly on today and tomorrow. We adapt to emerging priorities to ensure that everything we do is guided by a clear purpose: that Defence families feel heard, supported, and empowered, no matter where service life takes them.

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AUSTRALIA

# DFA Charter



Defence Families of Australia is the ministerially appointed, non-statutory, non-corporate advisory body for Defence and Government on matters pertaining to Australian Defence Force (ADF) families.

DFA provides a forum for families to raise matters, and assists families in accessing the Defence information they need. To do this, DFA performs the following tasks:



## 1. Provide Advice to the Minister and CDF

Provide advice to the Minister responsible for Defence Personnel, the Chief of the Defence Force and the relevant arms of the Australian Defence Organisation and stakeholders, on matters affecting ADF members and their families, in order to inform policy development and decision-making.



## 2. Inform and Collaborate with External Stakeholders

Provide timely information sharing and strengthen relationships with external stakeholders including local and state government, to progress positive family outcomes and to enhance the overall wellbeing of ADF families.



## 3. Provide a Recognised Forum for Defence Families

To provide a forum through which ADF members and their families can raise issues affecting them; to assist families in contacting appropriate persons or bodies on an issue; and to advocate on behalf of ADF families in order to advance outcomes for better collective impact that are beneficial to both the Defence family and the ADF.



## 4. Inform Defence Families

To assist the families of ADF members who seek its help by supporting them to obtain information on the benefits and assistance available to them from Defence, their rights and responsibilities and the Defence policies that affect them. This may include DFA assisting Defence and other relevant stakeholders in their efforts to inform all families of these benefits, assistance, rights and responsibilities, policies, and any changes to them in a community centric and trauma-informed way.



# Introduction from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel

The Australian Government is committed to improving the wellbeing of our Defence and veteran community as a whole - from the day someone signs up for a career in the ADF until long after they've hung up their uniform for the last time.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide made abundantly clear that we need to be better at focusing on the "being well" part of wellbeing, rather than waiting for issues to arise or conditions to become chronic.

That's not just relevant to a person's medical or physical health, but every facet of their lives.

That means not only supporting a veteran while they're in service and following, but supporting their families as well.

Defence families withstand frequent relocations, changes in employment and education and the challenges of separation during deployments.

Through the advocacy of Defence Families of Australia (DFA) we've heard the feedback from families and we've made changes.

Not only is Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs working more closely together to mitigate and ideally prevent illness and injury of all kinds, we've also enhanced how we support the families of those serving and after service.

We've expanded the ADF Family Health Program, have made it easier to access housing and have been working to minimise the negative impacts of the posting cycle by providing better visibility and flexibility to where a member might be posted across their careers.

We recognise the extraordinary resilience and sacrifices made by families who stand behind our most important capability, our Defence personnel.

Through their unwavering support, Defence families enhance the capability of our ADF and we are deeply grateful for their contribution.

I welcome the DFA Strategic Plan 2026-2030, these initiatives will help us better connect with families and deliver meaningful outcomes for the Defence community.

We are proud of our Defence families and thankful for everything they do. Together we will continue to build a strong, supportive environment for those who serve and those who support them.

**The Hon Matt Keogh**  
**Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel**

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# Introduction from the Chief of the Defence Force

Life in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) brings unique opportunities, not only for those who serve, but also for the families that stand alongside them.

Service life brings with it considerable demands, often requiring families to adapt quickly to relocations, shifting circumstances and extended periods of separation. Despite these challenges, our families consistently demonstrate quiet strength and remarkable resilience. Their role is vital, which is why Defence must ensure families feel genuinely valued, supported and included.

Over the past year, the ADF has continued to meet the demands of a high operational tempo, through exercises, deployments and missions abroad. These commitments have placed considerable pressure on our people and their families, often requiring long periods of separation and adjustment.

In this context, the work of Defence Families of Australia (DFA) has never been more vital. Staffed primarily by Defence families themselves, DFA brings deep insight and unwavering dedication to its mission. Their advocacy has driven meaningful change, ensuring that the needs of families are not overlooked amidst the demands of service.

As we look to the future, Defence must remain steadfast in its commitment to attracting and retaining a highly capable workforce. This means ensuring our people are empowered to thrive in their careers, while their families are equipped with the resources and support they need to navigate the journey alongside them.

It is therefore my pleasure to introduce the DFA Strategic Plan 2026-2030. This plan lays a strong foundation for a Defence community that is well-informed, inclusive and deeply supportive of its families.

I look forward to the achievements the DFA team will deliver as they bring this plan to life over the next three years.

**Admiral David Johnston, AC RAN**  
**Chief of the Defence Force**



# A Message from the Defence Family Advocate

Defence families are a critical pillar of Australia's Defence capability. They relocate, adapt, and sustain the home front through the demands of service life. The acknowledgement of the sacrifices that families make was highlighted in the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. At Defence Families of Australia, we are here to ensure families are not only seen, but heard, supported, and their contribution acknowledged.

At Defence Families of Australia, we are looking forward with purpose. While we honour the legacy built over decades, our mission is firmly anchored in tomorrow. As Defence families evolve, so too must the systems, policies, and supports that serve them.

This Strategic Plan for 2026–2030 sets a clear direction. It is informed by the lived experiences of Defence families and shaped by what they've told us matters most. Our focus is not on maintaining the status quo, but driving reform.

Three strategic priorities will guide our advocacy, communications, and engagement over the lifespan of this plan:

1. **Family Readiness:** Strengthening the preparedness and resilience of family units to navigate the unique challenges of service life.
2. **Contemporary Families:** Ensuring policies and systems reflect the diversity and complexity of modern Defence families.
3. **Family Wellbeing:** Empowering families to be confident, feel supported and be ready for Defence life. Strong families – Strong Defence.

In a complex and rapidly changing global landscape, families must have the support and resources they need to enable serving members to fulfil their duties without limitation.

As DFA enters this next chapter, I want to acknowledge the ongoing commitment, sacrifice, and support of the Defence family community. It is an honour to serve as your Advocate.

**Charlotte Webb**  
**Defence Family Advocate of Australia**





# The Defence Families Whose Lives are Shaped by Service

Australia's Defence Force families are a distinct and diverse community whose experiences are shaped by the unique experiences of Defence life.

Across Australia's cities, suburbs, and remote communities, thousands of families live the rhythm of Defence life. Defence families are as diverse as the nation itself, and it is important that policy settings evolve to meet the needs of contemporary ADF families.

The contributions of ADF families are not always seen, but their impact is profound. When families are supported, ADF members can serve with focus, purpose, and peace of mind. It is this steady presence, the families who stand beside their serving member, that underpins Australia's Defence capability.

Defence Families of Australia exists to represent and advocate for this community. By listening to their stories and elevating their voices, we work to ensure that policy, systems and services reflect the realities of Defence family life.



# Towards 2030



DFA is stepping into this next chapter with clear purpose and determination. Our goal is to ensure families are prepared, supported, and well-positioned to enable their serving member's unrestricted service.

***As we look ahead to 2030 and beyond, our role as the official, Ministerially appointed voice for current serving ADF families has never been more critical.***

With Australia's Defence capability expanding, operational demands shifting, and expectations on families evolving, our focus must not only meet today's needs but also anticipate tomorrow's.

Through intentional, outcomes-driven advocacy, DFA is influencing and strengthening the systems that shape Defence family life, from how policies are designed to how services are delivered. We remain committed to embedding the lived experience of families into every layer of decision-making across Defence, government, and the broader support ecosystem. By shaping conditions proactively, DFA is helping to create a future where Defence families are recognised and supported in their role in force-enablement.

## Our Advocacy

DFA will deepen our influence through sharper, data-informed advocacy, focusing on long-term policy reform in areas including housing, family employment, family wellbeing, education, and flexible services. Our Advocacy Map will continue to evolve as a transparent, public tool for highlighting our current focus areas and impact, whilst also creating new tools to shape and influence policy, programs, and services.

## Our Communication

DFA will strengthen our national presence and digital voice, telling the real stories of Defence families, promoting transparency, and building awareness of who we are and how we can help. Our communication will become more tailored and influential to those who have the decision-making powers to enact the changes we seek. We will be concise, values-aligned, and grounded in true reflections of the community we represent.

## Our Engagement

DFA will continue to meet families where they are, whether that be online or out in the community. Our Delegates will build deeper place-based connections, strengthening existing stakeholder relationships while forming new ones that hold strategic influence.



# Our Strategic Priorities Looking Forward



## Family Readiness

Empowering families to be confident, feel supported and be ready for the unique demands of Defence life beside strong and ready service members – strong families, strong Defence:

- Ready for service life
- Ready for postings
- Ready for absences
- Ready for conflict
- Ready for transition



## Contemporary Families

Supporting **all** Australian Defence Force Families:

- Acknowledging different family structures
- Embracing cultural and societal variation
- Ensuring non-discriminatory family engagement
- Ensuring flexibility and adaptability of family policies



## Family Wellbeing

Fostering a connected and empowered Defence community that supports the unique physical, mental and social wellbeing needs of families:

- Promoting the social and mental wellbeing of children and youth
- The impacts of Defence life on relationships
- Community and connection

# DFA's Strategic Pillars

## 1. Advocacy

- **Objective 1** – Build and maintain strong engagement and working relationships with Defence Families and stakeholders.
- **Objective 2** – Focus on the most significant advocacy issues.
- **Objective 3** – Maintain DFA's role as an independent voice that speaks to the interests of ADF families.

## 2. Collaboration

- **Objective 1** – Amplify the voice of Defence families through partnership with like-minded organisations.
- **Objective 2** – Broaden DFA's stakeholder network to capture a diverse range of perspectives, research, and expertise.
- **Objective 3** – Lead from the front in advocacy matters relating to ADF families, engaging like-minded stakeholders in our work.



## 3. Communication

- **Objective 1** – Bolster the credibility of our communications to ensure DFA's voice is effectively heard.
- **Objective 2** – Expand our communications reach by improving current engagement channels and creating new ones.
- **Objective 3** – Adopt a transparent and results-oriented communications approach.

## 4. Excellence

- **Objective 1** – Implement a structured, strategic approach to our work that clearly demonstrates value to our stakeholders.
- **Objective 2** – Foster a culture that prioritises teamwork and empowers individuals to contribute toward achieving excellence.
- **Objective 3** – Embrace a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability to ensure sustained success and ongoing relevance.

## 5. Outcomes

- **Objective 1** – Define short-to-medium term advocacy goals that are time-bound and make efficient use of DFA's resources.
- **Objective 2** – Identify our longer-term advocacy ambitions and understand the required steps to achieve large scale success on the systemic advocacy matters.
- **Objective 3** – Enhance and empower DFA's network of advocates and influencers.



# 1. Advocacy

Strategic Pillar

Purposefully engaging with Defence Families and stakeholders to ensure strong and effective advocacy, used to inform policy and influence decision-making that positively impacts Defence Families.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Build and maintain strong engagement and working relationships with Defence Families and stakeholders.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Through meaningful, ongoing engagement and relationship building with Defence Families and key stakeholders, DFA ensures it is accurately representing the Defence family community and has a “seat at the table” to discuss issues affecting families.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and maintaining open communication lines with those stakeholders who typically possess the influence to deliver the outcomes we are advocating for.</li> <li>• Deliberately engaging Defence Families and key personnel in our work through regular updates and meaningful consultation.</li> <li>• Establishing clear objectives and effectively deploying DFA resources to further these objectives.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focus on the most significant advocacy issues.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> In utilising DFA resources on high-priority, evidence-based issues, the organisation strives for meaningful impact in the areas that are most important to the community we represent.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding a set of targeted advocacy priorities which guides our work in addressing the most significant issues affecting Defence families.</li> <li>• Being consistent in our approach to identifying, developing, and delivering our advocacy work.</li> <li>• Ensuring our advocacy work is easily understood, avoids unnecessary detail, and that our “asks” are pragmatic, actionable, feasible, and relevant.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Maintain DFA’s role as an “independent voice” that speaks to the interests of ADF families.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Through our non-partisan actions and evidence-based approach to our advocacy, we fulfil our commitments as the official Australian Defence Force families advisory body.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering and presenting evidence from a range of sources and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Amplifying the voices of on-the-ground advocates, ensuring their insights and expertise are represented.</li> <li>• Positioning our work in such a way that it effectively demonstrates a case for change.</li> </ul>



## 2. Collaboration

Strategic Pillar

Undertaking intentional, diverse, and inclusive collaborative working, strengthening DFA’s advocacy work by bringing together research, expertise, and ideas to accomplish shared objectives.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Amplify the voice of Defence families through partnership with like-minded organisations.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Through a collaborative advocacy approach, DFA strengthens the credibility of its own advocacy whilst increasing its network of advocacy allies. In doing so, DFA demonstrates mutual recognition and understanding of advocacy priorities whilst harnessing the power of new ideas, additional resources, and broadened networks.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating the power of collaboration through our submissions, conversations, and advocacy efforts.</li> <li>• Deliberately engaging key personnel in our work through regular updates and meaningful consultation.</li> <li>• Establishing clear objectives and deploying the right DFA representatives to further these objectives.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Broaden DFA’s stakeholder network to capture a diverse range of perspectives, research, and expertise.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> By broadening our network and expanding our channels for engagement, DFA strengthens its overall advocacy position and enables a wide range of options and opinions to be considered.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapting our approach in order to effectively engage with a range of stakeholders.</li> <li>• Actively pursuing diverse perspectives and opinions across a range of advocacy matters.</li> <li>• Utilising our network as an opportunity to learn through evidence, research, and insights.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lead from the front on advocacy matters relating to ADF families, engaging with like-minded stakeholders in our work.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Through a proactive advocacy approach, DFA is courageous in its endeavours. By demonstrating confidence, capability, and active engagement in matters of importance, the organisation engages like-minded stakeholders to meaningfully contribute.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying stakeholders who share common goals and values and can contribute to meaningful progress.</li> <li>• Using a range of communication channels, visual tools and storytelling techniques to engage our audience.</li> <li>• Demonstrating our commitment to our work and empowering others to take action.</li> </ul>



### 3. Communication

Strategic Pillar

Strengthening our reputation and expanding our reach to increase the impact of DFA’s work through transparent conversations and outcomes-driven interactions.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Bolster the credibility of our communications to ensure DFA’s voice is effectively heard.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> DFA builds credibility and demonstrates value to stakeholders through effective communications, strengthening its advocacy and ensuring its voice resonates across the Defence network.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy and consistently executing it.</li> <li>• Gaining a deep understanding of our audience and their preferred ways of engaging with DFA.</li> <li>• Showcasing our expertise through high-quality, credible, and engaging content.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Expand our communications reach by improving current engagement channels and creating new ones.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> By developing its engagement and communication channels, DFA boosts its visibility while expanding its advocacy and influence across the Defence network.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying our target audience and creating initiatives and meaningful opportunities to connect with them.</li> <li>• Enhancing engagement and communication through existing channels.</li> <li>• Tapping into the networks of other organisations to engage their audiences in DFA’s work.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adopt a transparent and results-oriented communications approach.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> In valuing every interaction and maintaining an outcomes-driven mindset, DFA delivers clear, transparent communications that strengthen its credibility and fosters collaboration.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the purpose and objectives behind each interaction.</li> <li>• Identifying the desired outcomes that guide our communications.</li> <li>• Maintaining openness, transparency, and focus in all our communications.</li> </ul>



## 4. Excellence

### Strategic Pillar

Adopting a systematic approach to advocacy and fostering a continuous improvement culture to ensure DFA operates efficiently and enhances its overall value.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Implement a structured, strategic approach to our work that clearly showcases value to our stakeholders.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> By focusing on strategic planning and deliberate action, DFA ensures its efforts align with the significance and intended outcomes of our advocacy.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting a systems-driven approach, with established processes, resources, and tools to guide our efforts.</li> <li>• Regularly assessing DFA’s advocacy priorities, ensuring adequate resources are allocated to support the significance and purpose of our work.</li> <li>• Focusing on advocacy efforts that aim to transform systems, policies, and practices for the benefit of Australian Defence Families.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Foster a culture that prioritises teamwork and empowers individuals to contribute toward achieving excellence.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Guided by our values and behaviours, DFA creates a productive, purpose-driven, and high-performing environment, where individuals are self-reliant and empowered to make decisions.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring DFA’s values, beliefs, and attitudes positively shape the organisation’s culture.</li> <li>• Staying focused on our core purpose and acknowledging the visible and unseen impact of our work.</li> <li>• Celebrating our successes and learning from the challenges we face.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Embrace a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability to ensure sustained success and ongoing relevance.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> By embracing continuous learning, the organisation develops new skills, acquires knowledge, and strengthens existing capabilities, ensuring ongoing adaptability and long-term success.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging knowledge sharing, both within DFA and with external stakeholders.</li> <li>• Creating an operating environment that treats learning as a crucial business function.</li> <li>• Identifying new learning opportunities and fostering shared responsibility for growth and development.</li> </ul>



## 5. Outcomes

Strategic Pillar

Approaching our work with strategic intent and targeting key decision-makers, ensuring our actions are focused, outcomes-driven, and influence decision-making in the best interests of Defence families.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Define short-to-medium advocacy goals that are time-bound and make efficient use of DFA's resources.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Through focusing on short-term goals and targeted initiatives, DFA creates immediate value while advancing its longer-term strategic objectives.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritising achievable, action-oriented, and time-bound performance opportunities.</li> <li>• Aligning our resources effectively to the objectives we set.</li> <li>• Tracking our progress, showcasing our successes, and regularly adjusting our near-term goals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Engage decision-makers who have the power to create meaningful outcomes for Defence families.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Recognising decision-makers as DFA's primary audience, the organisation directs its advocacy efforts toward those who can drive the changes we seek.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the system, identifying its decision-makers, and recognising what matters to them.</li> <li>• Guiding decision-makers from a place of empathy and understanding toward taking decisive action.</li> <li>• Leveraging DFA's network of influencers to generate external pressure and drive change.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Enhance and empower DFA's network of advocates and influencers.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> By identifying and nurturing our influencer network, DFA can educate and empower those who have access to decision-makers and may directly influence them.</p> <p><b>We achieve this by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and actively expanding DFA's network of influencers.</li> <li>• Gaining insights into our influencers to understand their strategic value and alignment with our cause.</li> <li>• Consistently engaging the right influencers in our work, as collaborators or allies.</li> </ul>



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For any questions or to provide feedback on any information in this document,  
please contact any of the DFA team listed at [dfa.org.au/contact](https://dfa.org.au/contact)

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