



# QUEENSLAND CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH (QCMHR)

Queensland's premier mental health research organisation

## MILITARY AND VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP CAPABILITY STATEMENT

### About our research in military and veterans' mental health

Mental health and suicide are important health issues in military and veteran communities. In response, Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research (QCMHR) has now formed a dedicated Military and Veterans' Mental Health Research Group under the leadership of Professor Ed Heffernan, head of QCMHR's Forensic Mental Health Research Stream, Director of Queensland's Forensic Mental Health Service (Queensland Health), and psychiatrist in the Australian Army Reserve. The group has a vision to create new knowledge about the mental health of serving and ex-serving Defence members and is undertaking projects that are aligned with a number of Defence Health Research Priorities (2021-2025), including (i) Mental Health, (ii) Measuring and monitoring the health of the force, (iii) Health of the future war fighter, (iv) Occupational and environmental health, and (v) Health system performance and efficiency.

Our work is organised across three research programs, outlined in the figure below.

#### PROGRAM 1

Data Linkage  
(suicidality, distress and mental illness)

**PROJECT 1.**  
Understanding and enhancing first responses to suicide crises involving current serving and ex-serving ADF members

Funded by Defence Health Foundation

**PROJECT 2.**  
Understanding and improving responses to suicidality to DVA clients: proposed data linkage study

Funded by Department of Veterans' Affairs

**PROJECT 3.**  
Understanding and enhancing first responses to suicide crises involving current serving and ex-serving ADF members

Funded by DVSR

#### PROGRAM 2

Training resources and e-learning

**PROJECT 1.**  
Examining suicidality and improving responses in military and veteran populations (collaboration with GMRF)

Funded by Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation

#### PROGRAM 3

Research training and capacity exchange

**PhD STUDENTS**  
**LT COL Samantha Hodges**  
"Understanding suicide events in the Australian Army to improve outcomes"

**LT COL Csongor Oltvolgyi**  
"Understanding and improving responses to suicidality in Australian Military Veterans"

**RANZCP Scholarly Project**  
**LT COL Andrew Ramage**  
Video Resource Evaluation: First Responses to Veteran Suicide Crisis

### Reflecting on the origins of our research program

Our research program has grown out of an intersection between Prof Ed Heffernan's role as the Director of Queensland's Forensic Mental Health Service, the activities of QCMHR's Forensic Mental Health Research Stream, Ed's clinical expertise in Psychiatry, and his role as a Psychiatrist in the Army Reserves.

Current areas of collaborative research focus for our Military and Veterans' Mental Health Research Group are underpinned by the development of a unique linked dataset, known as Partners in Prevention. This dataset, produced in collaboration between the Queensland Forensic Mental Health Service and our Forensic Mental Health Research Stream, includes over 200,000 suicide crisis events which have been linked to 70,000 individuals who were in contact with Queensland police or ambulance responders between 2014-2017. Two thousand of these individuals relate to Defence personnel, or their families, who have experienced a suicide crisis.



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## RESPONDING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF DEFENCE FORCE PERSONNEL, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

### Key partnerships

Our research group is proud to partner with the following organisations in the conduct of our work:

- Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation
- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicides
- Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service (First Responders)
- Toowong Private Hospital

### About QCMHR

Established in 1987, QCMHR is Queensland's premier mental health research organisation, funded by Queensland Health. While we are hosted within West Moreton Hospital and Health Service, QCMHR works locally, nationally, and internationally to create new knowledge about mental health to reduce the impact of mental illness in our communities.

Like many other successful hospital-based research centres in Queensland, QCMHR has a formal research partnership with The University of Queensland (UQ) which has spanned almost three decades. In line with community expectations and local, state and national research priorities, our 13 research streams work to:

- Understand the causes and prevalence of mental disorders,
- Determine risk factors for mental disorders,
- Discover new and improved clinical treatments and interventions,
- Improve mental health services and systems, and
- Translate our research findings into improved policies and practice.

### Contact

Are you keen to support QCMHR's work in military and veterans' mental health? To discuss opportunities to help us improve and maintain positive mental health in military and veteran communities, contact:

**Kate Gadenne**  
**Snr Research Development Officer**  
Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research  
West Moreton Health  
T: 0438727895  
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### Learn more

Visit: <https://qcmhr.org/research/emerging-research-streams/veterans-mental-health-research-emerging-stream/>

### MEET OUR RESEARCH TEAM



#### GROUP LEADER: PROFESSOR ED HEFFERNAN

As well as being the leader of QCMHR's Forensic Mental Health Research Stream, Professor Ed Heffernan is the Director of Queensland's Forensic Mental Health Service and a psychiatrist in the Australian Army Reserve. Ed's impressive mix of clinical skills, research know-how and experience as a serving Defence member, psychiatrist, mental health researcher, and psychiatric epidemiologist make him well-placed to lead our new research group, and to understand and respond to the issues faced by service personnel, veterans, and their families.



#### ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CARLA MEURK, PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER

A/Prof Carla Meurk is a Principal Researcher at QCMHR and honorary senior fellow at The University of Queensland. She is Coordinating Principal Investigator of the Partners in Prevention: Understanding and Enhancing First Responses to Suicide Crisis Situations project and has a particular interest in suicide prevention, novel non-clinical crisis care services and care pathways, gender, suicidality, and distress, and distress and suicidality among individuals in at risk professions. Dr Meurk has expertise in complex research governance, data linkage, mixed methods research, and e-learning.



#### DR MICHAEL LAM, DATA SCIENTIST

Dr Michael Lam is a data scientist at QCMHR and an adjunct fellow at The University of Queensland. He is the lead data scientist for the project Partners in Prevention: Understanding and Enhancing First Responses to Suicide Crisis Situations and its extension on current and ex-serving members of the ADF who have suicide related contacts with police or paramedics. Dr Lam has particular expertise in managing and analysing large linked datasets.