



NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

Our reference: 2020/3722

Records retention notice

Records related to Australian Defence Force members' and veterans' suicides, and suicide prevention.

To the named Commonwealth departments and agencies:

- Department of Defence and portfolio agencies
- Department of Veterans' Affairs and portfolio agencies
- Department of Home Affairs and relevant portfolio agencies
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and relevant portfolio agencies

- Attorney-General's Department and relevant portfolio agencies
- Department of Health and relevant portfolio agencies
- Prime Minister and Cabinet and relevant portfolio agencies

- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Comcare
- Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation
- National Mental Health Commission
- Services Australia

As well as:

- any other agencies holding records relevant to defence members' and veterans' suicides or suicide prevention, their mental health and wellbeing or otherwise relevant to the Letters Patent of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

This document notifies the named Australian Government agencies and other agents or people in possession of Commonwealth records that I have issued a records retention notice for Commonwealth records that relate to Australian Defence Force members' and veterans' suicides and suicide prevention in general that will support the work of the [Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide](#) and any subsequent actions by the Government.

The National Archives of Australia has determined that a records retention notice is necessary to ensure that relevant records are protected and available when required.

Agencies should be aware that the disposal freeze on [records relating to allegations of abuse in Defence](#) remains in place. Records described in that disposal freeze may have continuing relevance to the Royal Commission.

Background

In February 2020 the Australian Government announced its intention to establish an independent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention to undertake a review of past defence members' and veterans' deaths by suicide.

To further underline the Government's intent to reduce the rate of suicide amongst ADF personnel and veterans, the Prime Minister announced on 19 April 2021 the intention to establish a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Noting the establishment of the National Commissioner is subject to the passage of legislation currently before Parliament, the interim National Commissioner is no longer taking enquiries, however it will continue to work with people who have registered their interest in working with the National Commissioner prior to the Royal Commission which started work on 8 July 2021.

Purpose

This document is to notify relevant Australian Government agencies and other agents or people in possession of Commonwealth records that any relevant records must be retained for the purposes of informing the [Terms of Reference](#) and the considerations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, and any subsequent actions by the Government.

It is possible that some of the relevant records have been authorised for destruction under general and agency-specific records authorities issued by the National Archives or using a normal administrative practice (NAP). The purpose of this notice is to prevent any such destruction and to ensure that all relevant existing and future records are available for current and future actions.

This notice suspends the National Archives of Australia's permission to destroy any relevant records.

Relevant records and any associated drafts and working documents cannot be destroyed using any agency-specific or general records authorities. Most normal administrative practices (NAP) are also suspended except where digital copies of records are created, stored and can be made accessible in agency systems.

It is a legal requirement that you apply this notice by protecting any relevant records and conveying this to the relevant people in your organisation as a matter of urgency. Penalties for the unauthorised destruction of documents and records are specified in various Commonwealth laws, including the *Archives Act 1983*.

Records

This records retention notice covers relevant records in all formats, including paper files and documents, microfilm and magnetic tapes, audio and visual recordings, photographs and records created digitally, including but not limited to:

emails, documents created by word processing and other office applications, residing in designated document and records management systems, on shared work group spaces, on shared, local or personal drives or in any other locations/media, such as thumb drives, laptops and other portable devices.

The notice also covers relevant information and data in all current and non-current databases and digital business systems such as those used for management of finance and human resources, client relationship or business-specific workflow and case management systems. It also applies to information that has not been captured into formal business systems including emails and other communications using text and instant messaging applications on personal devices, social media posts, personal notebooks and unregistered files or folders.

All relevant information in digital formats, including information and data in databases and other digital business systems, must be maintained with all the necessary metadata so as to support retrieval and access to authentic and reliable information.

The categories of records subject to the retention notice are described in **Schedule 1**.

Departments and portfolio agencies are reminded that a [disposal freeze relating to allegations of abuse in Defence](#) remains in force and that records subject to that freeze may be of relevance to the work of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Authority

This action is taken pursuant to paragraphs 24(2)(b) and 24(2)(c) of the *Archives Act 1983*.

Duration

This notice will take effect immediately **and will be in force until further notice by the National Archives**.

Action required

Agencies and other agents or people in possession of relevant Commonwealth records should:

1. Ensure that all relevant workers are informed of the records retention notice.
2. Conduct a risk assessment to:
 - a. determine if workers, contractors or records service providers have any records due for destruction that come within the scope of the records retention notice; and
 - b. identify and retain relevant existing and future records subject to this notice.
3. Check any records already proposed for destruction that may come within the scope of the retention notice to ensure they are not covered by the retention notice.
4. Retain existing and future records subject to the retention notice until further notice.

Impact

The processing, reviewing and storage costs arising from the implementation of this notice will be borne by the agencies or other agents or people concerned.

Inquiries

For inquiries about this notice, please contact the Agency Service Centre at information.management@naa.gov.au.

Issued by

Yaso Arumugam
Assistant Director-General, Data and Digital
National Archives of Australia

23 September 2021

Schedule 1: Records subject to the retention notice

Category 1

Department of Defence and portfolio agency records related to:

- personnel policies, including legislative and policy frameworks relating to support services, claims and entitlements
- mental health and suicide prevention initiatives
- policies concerning the discharge of personnel
- Defence disciplinary records
- suicides of persons in the Australian Defence Force, including:
 - recruitment of the member
 - posting records
 - transition from the ADF or between service categories
 - health, wellbeing and support services available to the member
 - mental and physical health of the member
 - the operations they were involved in
- Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force investigation records
- work health and safety records and incident reporting
- security clearance and other recruitment related vetting records

Department of Veterans' Affairs and portfolio agency records related to:

- legislative, policy and procedural frameworks relating to support services, service delivery programs, claims and entitlements
- mental health and suicide prevention initiatives
- name identified material in veteran and dependant case files or related records in systems, processes, counselling records, fraud investigations, legal records or other veteran and dependant case file records
- contacts between families or representatives of veterans and DVA
- investigations into how individual claims or types of claims have been treated
- suicides of veterans

Department of Home Affairs and relevant portfolio agency records related to:

- suicides of persons who have served in the Australian Defence Force
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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and relevant portfolio agency records related to:

- Australian defence attaches
- suicides of persons who have served in the Australian Defence Force

Category 2

Attorney-General's Department and relevant portfolio agency records related to:

- any matter reasonably incidental to Defence and veteran suicide including policy and investigation

Department of Health and relevant portfolio agency records related to:

- broader community suicide prevention initiatives
- broader community mental health initiatives
- any contact with Defence or DVA about suicide prevention/mental health

Prime Minister and Cabinet and relevant portfolio agency records related to:

- any matter reasonably incidental to Defence and veteran suicide including policy and investigation

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care records related to:

- research into suicide and suicidal ideation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare records related to:

- research into suicide and suicidal ideation

Comcare records related to:

- all records relating to claim files, rehabilitation records and compensation applications of individuals who have or had served in the Australian Defence Force or Reserves

Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation records related to:

- all superannuation records relating to current or former Australian Defence Force or Reserves members, including ADF Super, Military Super, and DFRDB

National Mental Health Commission records related to:

- research, monitoring and policy reforms related to suicide and suicidal ideation

Services Australia

- all case file records relating to assistance or entitlements provided to individuals who had previously served in the Australian Defence Force or Reserves
- all policies or research relating to the wellbeing of Australian Defence Force members or veterans if any

Category 3

Records held by any other agencies related to:

- defence members' and veterans' suicides or suicide prevention, their mental health and wellbeing or otherwise relevant to the Letters Patent of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide