

# Reporting abuse in Defence

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, within its Defence Force Ombudsman jurisdiction, is able to receive reports of serious abuse within the Australian Defence Force (Defence). This provides a confidential mechanism to report serious abuse for those who feel unable, for whatever reason, to access Defence's internal mechanisms. Serious abuse means sexual abuse, serious physical abuse or serious bullying or harassment which occurred between two (or more) people who were serving in Defence at the time.

## Reporting abuse

Our staff are here to support you through the process of making a report of abuse. Your report will remain confidential and will not be shared with Defence or any other agency without your consent.

We can help you to document your report. We will assess what actions may be available and appropriate to respond to your report, which could include:

- Participation in the Ombudsman's Restorative Engagement program.

The program is designed to support you, as a reportee, to tell your personal account of abuse to a senior representative from Defence in a private, facilitated meeting—a Restorative Engagement conference. The conference also provides the opportunity for Defence to acknowledge and respond to your personal story of abuse.

- A facilitated referral to access counselling through Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling (formerly known as the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service).
- A recommendation to Defence that it make a reparation payment in relation to certain reports of abuse.

A reparation payment is a payment to a person, made by Defence on behalf of the Australian Government, in acknowledgement that the most serious forms of abuse and/or sexual assault within Defence is wrong, that it should not have occurred and that Defence, through its actions or inactions, created the circumstances which allowed this abuse to occur.

## Who can make a report to the Defence Force Ombudsman

The Ombudsman can receive reports of serious abuse in Defence from 1 December 2016. Reports can be made by a reportee who was, at the time the abuse is alleged to have occurred:

- a member of the Australian Defence Force, or
- an Australian Public Service employee deployed outside Australia, or

### Contact us

1300 395 776

[Defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:Defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

[ombudsman.gov.au](http://ombudsman.gov.au)

GPO Box 442  
Canberra ACT 2601

### The Ombudsman has offices in:

- » Adelaide
- » Brisbane
- » Canberra
- » Melbourne
- » Perth
- » Sydney

- a Defence contractor engaged to provide services outside Australia, either in connection with an operation of the Defence Force or for the purpose of capacity building or peacekeeping functions by the Defence Force.

A report of serious abuse in Defence can be made by a reportee's authorised representative (i.e. family member). There is no requirement to have legal representation.

A report of abuse may be made using our Reporting Abuse Form, which is in the form of a statutory declaration and is available on our [website](#).

### Assessment process

The Ombudsman will progress the assessment of each report of abuse as quickly as possible. We can accept reports where we are satisfied:

- it constitutes serious abuse
- it is reasonably likely to have occurred
- you were, at the time of the alleged abuse, a member of Defence
- the alleged abuser was a member of Defence, and
- there is a connection between the alleged abuse and your employment in Defence.

As part of the process, we will seek your consent to provide information about the abuse to Defence, so that it can provide information to help us assess your report.

### Influencing improvement in Defence

We will also analyse the information we receive to identify any trends or potential emerging issues. We have established an inspection program to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of Defence's internal procedures for receiving, responding to and managing reports of abuse from its members.

We use the information gathered from reports of abuse and our inspections to inform recommendations to Defence for systemic change and improvements.

### Need more information?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Reporting Abuse in Defence are available on our [website](#), where you can also find factsheets about the Ombudsman's Restorative Engagement program, counselling referrals and reparation payments.

If you have any questions or concerns about making a report of abuse, you are encouraged to contact a Liaison Officer during business hours (9am – 5pm AEST) on **1300 395 776** or via email at [defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au).

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More information is available at [ombudsman.gov.au](http://ombudsman.gov.au).

Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason, the information should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases. To the maximum extent permitted by the law, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not liable to you for any loss or damage suffered as a result of reliance on this document. For the most up-to-date versions of cited Acts, please refer to the [Federal Register of Legislation](#).