

Reporting abuse in Defence

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, as Defence Force Ombudsman, receives reports of Defence abuse and is empowered to take appropriate action. We are an independent complaints mechanism (outside Defence and outside the chain of command) for those who are uncomfortable reporting abuse within Defence.

Reporting abuse

For the purposes of the Ombudsman's abuse reporting functions, abuse includes sexual abuse, serious physical abuse and serious bullying or harassment. A report of abuse may be made using our Reporting Abuse Form, which is available on our [website](#).

If at any time you need support, our Office can facilitate a referral for you to access counselling through Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling.

If your abuse is assessed as being within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, we may be able to take appropriate action in response including investigating the report of abuse and making recommendations to Defence.

In addition, you may choose to participate 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. More information on the Restorative Engagement program can be found on our [website](#).

Your report will also be used to contribute to Defence's commitment to cultural reform.

Who can make a report to the Defence Force Ombudsman

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
- 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 abuse in Defence can be made by a reportee's authorised representative (e.g. family member). There is no requirement to have legal representation, however you can be supported by legal representation if you prefer.

Contact us

ombudsman.gov.au

defenceforce.ombudsman.gov.au
[@ombudsman.gov.au](https://twitter.com/ombudsman.gov.au)

GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

The Ombudsman has offices in:

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

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 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.

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.

If you are experiencing any significant mental health concerns, please call the following services:

Lifeline: **131 114**

Beyond Blue: **1300 224 636**

Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling: **1800 011 046**

More information is available at 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](#).