

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

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](#).

Your report will remain confidential and will not be shared with Defence or any other agency without your consent.

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

Once your report has been submitted to the Office, we will assess what actions may be available and appropriate to respond to your report. This 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 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.

For your report to be considered for a reparation payment, you must contact the Ombudsman's Office by **30 June 2022** and either submit a report of the abuse or provide written notification that you intend to submit a report of abuse, which you must then submit by 30 June 2023.

Contact us

ombudsman.gov.au

defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

1300 395 776

GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

The Ombudsman has offices in:

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

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
- 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 (e.g. family member). There is no requirement to have legal representation, however you can be supported by legal representation if you prefer.

Assessment process

The Ombudsman will progress the assessment of each report of abuse as quickly as possible. Please note that due to the increased number of reports being received, this process is currently taking between **12-18 months**.

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.

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 and reparation payments.

If you have any questions or concerns about making a report of abuse, contact our Liaison Officer team via email at defenceforce.ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au.

If you need to speak to someone outside of our business hours, or to speak to someone urgently, 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](#).