

Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH)

ADF members

Changes in your mental health and wellbeing can appear at any time throughout your career and might look different for each person. Early recognition of these changes and taking action to address them can keep your mental health on track. The Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH) research project asked ADF members about early changes to their mental health.

Commonly observed
early changes to mental
health by ADF members

Issues with **sleep**

Feeling more **irritable** or **angry** than usual

Less involved with usually enjoyable activities

What supports did ADF members access when experiencing changes in their mental health and wellbeing?

Reaching out to social supports (family and friends), colleagues, mental health practitioners, or Command.

How were ADF members managing these changes in their mental health and wellbeing?

- There was a strong preference from members to actively self-manage changes to their mental health and wellbeing using strategies such as exercise, listening to music/podcasts, or re-engaging in enjoyable activities.
- Around half of ADF members reported an issue that they didn't seek professional help for, because they chose to self-manage instead or felt there were barriers to seeking support.

What did ADF members think were the barriers to seeking support?

- Fear that seeking help would impact their career (e.g. medical status change)
- Self-stigma (e.g. fear than others might think they are trying to get out of work)
- Long wait times for appointments with health practitioners
- Impact on others (e.g. others burdened by additional work if they take time off)
- Lack of privacy (e.g. colleagues finding out because they've been seen at the medical clinic)
- Issues approaching chain of command (e.g. not feeling comfortable to discuss mental health issues).

What can ADF members do to address early mental health symptoms?

Recognise when you are not feeling like your normal self

- **Check in on yourself.** How is your sleep, your mood, your engagement with others? Changes in these areas may indicate that you need some additional support.
- **Others may notice changes in your behaviour.** Your peers, leadership, and family members may notice changes from your usual self before you are aware yourself. Be open to hearing feedback about these changes and take steps to manage them.
- **Check in on those around you.** A proactive conversation about wellbeing can encourage early help-seeking and help prevent the impact of changes in mental health.

Actively self-manage

- If you recognise you are not feeling like your usual self, try to actively self-manage through strategies like undertaking physical activity, participating in social activities and reaching out to and spending time with your support network (such as your family and friends).
- Active self-management requires effort to engage in a behaviour. Passive-self management (the act of not doing anything), such as sitting back and letting an issue resolve itself is not an effective approach.

Reach out for support

- Seek help early, no matter the cause. Activities aimed at improving and maintaining mental health are not reserved for when your mental health is suffering.
- Use the broad network of support within Defence that you can access, both formally and informally.
- Seek out leaders and health service providers - these are part of your network of support.
- Be proactive in 'reaching out'. When you notice changes from your usual self – the earlier you seek support, the more likely you are to get on top of and manage these changes. This will ultimately reduce the likelihood that seeking support will impact your career.

Talk about your own experiences to help others

- Share your stories with others. Sharing your own positive help-seeking experiences can be very powerful and an effective way to break down barriers to help-seeking.

Resources



Headstrength



NewAccess



High Res



PTSD Coach

Key take-aways

- **Check in on yourself, are you feeling different to usual?** Changes from your usual self indicate that you may benefit from some support and active self-management.
- **Check in with others if you notice they're different from their usual selves.** If you notice a friend or colleague seems different from usual, reach out and see if they're ok.
- **Get on top of your mental health changes early.** A common worry is that help-seeking might impact your career, but seeking help as soon as you notice changes reduces the likelihood of symptoms worsening and there being any career impacts.



To read the full WATCH Project Report [click here](#) or scan the QR code. Contact the research team for more information at health.research@defence.gov.au.