

Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH)

Family members

Changes in the mental health and wellbeing of ADF members can appear at any time throughout their career and might look different for each person. Families can play an active role in facilitating help-seeking behaviours in serving family members. The Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH) research project asked family members about early changes to ADF members' mental health.

Commonly observed
early changes to
mental health by Family
members

- **Withdrawal** from usual family activities and interactions
- More **irritable** than usual
- Issues with **sleep**
- Increased time on **technology** (phone, gaming, tv)
- Difficulty with **everyday tasks**

What did family observe ADF members doing about these changes?

- The majority of family noted that ADF members avoided seeking professional help.
- Instead ADF members passively self-managed (i.e. not doing anything), actively self-managed (e.g. trying mindfulness), or talked with family and friends.

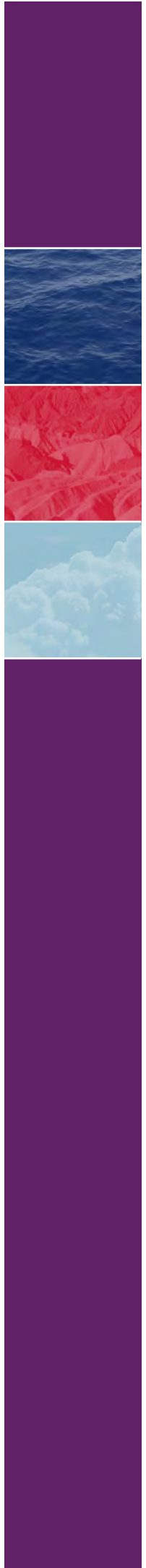
What can family members do to help?

Recognise the signs

- Early changes in a serving family member's usual behaviour are signs they might need more support.
- Recognising these early indicators of mental health challenges is essential for early intervention and can help to reduce the impact these changes have on ADF members and their family.
- Changes in mental health and wellbeing may be most noticeable during stages of transition. This includes transitioning from deployment, moving into new roles, or returning from being a Member with Dependants Unaccompanied.

Offer support

- Provide emotional support such as actively listening by trying to understand how they are feeling.
- Conversations about mental health can be challenging and difficult at times. Use resources for family members such as those listed below.



Link in with other supports

- Recommend that your serving family member talks to someone about the changes they are experiencing. They could seek out a health professional, their commanding officer, colleague, chaplain, Open Arms, or someone at Defence Member and Family Support.
- Encourage reaching out to informal supports, such as talking to a trusted family member or friend.

Take time for yourself

- Supporting an ADF member can be challenging and it is important to take time for yourself to support your own wellbeing. Do something enjoyable, get out into nature, take a break, do some physical activity, get some rest.
- Accessing informal forms of support can be beneficial. Take time to catch up with friends or family. Defence Family groups are available to connect with other family members of current serving members.

Resources



Defence
Member and
Family Helpline



Defence Family
Matters



Open Arms
Treatment
Programs &
Workshops



Defence Health
and wellbeing
fact sheets

Key take-aways

- **Make sure you are looking after yourself to support your own wellbeing.** Family members found that connecting with other Defence families supported them to look after their own wellbeing.
- **Offer support and encourage help seeking.** Addressing early mental health symptoms is essential for optimising wellbeing in ADF members. Family members noticed that by the time their serving family member came to them for help, their mental health had further declined. Reaching out early may potentially encourage your serving family member to seek support, even if they are resistant.
- **Talk to your serving family member.** Mention that early treatment of mental health symptoms is likely to prevent worsening to a point where it can impact their career. Remind serving family members that being proactive and getting on top of symptoms early benefits them.



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.