



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel
and



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

18 June 2019

ASSISTANCE DOGS-IN-TRAINING TO SUPPORT OUR VETERANS

THE assistance dog trial helping veterans who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is under way in Victoria and showing positive signs during the initial phases.

Today the Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel, Darren Chester, met with La Trobe University and the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs Australia (CSTDA) to talk about the progress of the \$2 million assistance dog trial funded by the Australian Government, and how the fostered dogs and veterans are finding the experience.

“The first group of dogs have been living with their foster families for the past three months, and are undertaking weekly training over a 12-month period,” Mr Chester said.

“Participating veterans are also undergoing training on how to become handlers of psychiatric assistance dogs over that time.

“I’m pleased to see the trial is progressing well, and am confident that this approach to supporting veterans with PTSD will make a meaningful difference to their lives. This is the first time the Federal Government has provided financial backing to a trial of this nature and something that I am proud to support.

“Supporting this trial is just one step this Government is taking to put veterans and their families first, and more than \$230 million a year is being invested in supporting the mental health of veterans.”

Professor Pauleen Bennett from La Trobe University said that they are now seeking veterans to take part in the second cohort of the assistance dog trial.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling, provides support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Free and confidential help is available 24/7.

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“A new group of puppies will soon join the second cohort of the trial, and therefore we are seeking veterans living in the Melbourne area who are being treated for the management of clinically diagnosed PTSD to take part in this next phase,” Professor Bennett said.

“The trial is a comprehensive process that takes into account the specific needs of the participating veteran – such as determining the most appropriate breed and temperament of dog to support the veteran’s mental health needs, and the bonding process between the dog and participant.

“We expect these dogs will improve the veterans’ sleep quality, as well as confidence to socialise with others in their community and engage in everyday life.”

The trial outcomes will enable evidence to be collected to inform future policy and help the Government to continue to meet the mental health needs of veterans.

“In addition to the trial, DVA will soon be providing psychiatric assistance dogs to eligible veterans who are undertaking existing treatment for the management of PTSD,” Mr Chester said.

“This will allow DVA to respond to the needs of veterans now, while continuing to collect evidence through the work with La Trobe University.”

To find out more about the trial and how to participate, email DogsOnCampus@latrobe.edu.au

ENDS

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