



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Open Arms - Veterans and Families Counselling

SPEECH

Monday, 26 November 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 26 November 2018 Page 154 Questioner Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
--	---

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (16:57): I'm delighted to rise today in support of the motion from the member for Dawson. I also acknowledge the words of the member for Solomon. It is indeed important to ensure we have bipartisanship on this motion. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our Defence Force personnel, both past and present. It's a debt that we can never fully repay, especially to those exposed to the horror of war. But we should try—we should damn well try. In the catalogue of outstanding service provided by Australians to Australia, surely no sacrifice is greater than that of the men and women who commit themselves to the defence of our democracy and its citizens.

The personal cost of military service, especially operational service, is incredibly varied and complex. Many injuries are deep-seated, and at first appear quite subtle, often taking years to manifest themselves. Yet these injuries are no less real or cripplingly painful—at times, even fatal—than those caused by a bullet or shrapnel. As the member for Dawson's motion notes, last month the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, following extensive consultation, updated the name of the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service—which itself was renamed in 2007 from the Vietnam Veterans Families Counselling Service—VVCS, to Open Arms - Veterans and Families Counselling. Open Arms is committed to providing the highest-quality specialist counselling and support in the best traditions of the VVCS to current and ex-serving ADF members and their families. This confidential support service is free to anyone who has served even one day in the ADF and to the wider veteran community across Australia. The scope of the services offered by Open Arms has expanded significantly since the establishment of the original VVCS 36 years ago to now include specialist counselling and support for ADF personnel transitioning to civilian life, together with relationship issues and problems of anxiety, depression, anger management, sleep disorders, alcohol and substance abuse and, of course, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Despite its wider focus, Open Arms will always remain a service founded by Vietnam veterans when, in 1982, the Australian government established the VVCS after 10 years of hard lobbying by veterans following Australia's withdrawal from Vietnam. The new Open Arms branding honours that legacy with the acknowledgement that Open Arms is a service founded by Vietnam veterans for all veterans. The name Open Arms itself holds great meaning for our Vietnam veterans as a symbol of support, safety and security. Reminiscent of that conflict, the name evokes the image of a soldier standing in a clearing with open arms to signal the helicopter pilots, who provided a lifeline to ground troops, and show them where to land to bring supplies and evacuate the wounded.

The Vietnam War was Australia's second-longest conflict, exceeded only by the current war in Afghanistan. The tragedy of Vietnam tore at Australia's social fabric, perhaps more than any conflict since the First World War, and damaged an entire generation of young Australians. The true nature and extent of that damage was not widely understood or acknowledged at the time and so it took more than a decade for the pain and stress associated with that combat experience to be meaningfully addressed by the establishment of VVCS. The Open Arms of today and the VVCS that preceded it is the enduring legacy of those veterans and is their gift to future generations of men and women who serve in the defence of our nation