




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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ADJOURNMENT

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, Report

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (9.37 pm): Every week for a quarter of a century there has been a funeral for a veteran who has taken their own life. Every week, another battle lost. Every week, another family devastated. Every week, another child loses their mum or dad—their hero.

The infantrymen that I served with are twice as likely to die by suicide than other Australian men. Women who have served in a combat role die by suicide at a rate that is more than 4½ times that of other Australian women. Those are statistics that every Australian should be concerned about—statistics that every member of this parliament should be ashamed of. This is not about politics. Both the Labor Party and the LNP have failed veterans in the last quarter of a century.

In my first speech to parliament I recounted my experiences from 2013 when, after returning from Afghanistan, I was home and I began to wonder if I would be better off ending my life so that I would not be a burden on my family, and I had worked out how to do it. I spoke of one afternoon when my wife, Anna, cancelled her shift as a police officer to be by my side. I reflected on how different things might have been had she not done that.

Service in the Australian Army was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, but service in the military comes at a cost. After that day in 2013 I was diagnosed with PTSD—a consequence of my military service in Afghanistan and Timor Leste. While the impact of my PTSD has lessened over time, the truth is that I will always carry the effects of my service. Ten years later, I still lay awake at night afraid to go to sleep, fearful of the flashbacks that are still far too frequent. Ten years later, too often I am unreasonably irritated and agitated. Ten years later, I still place myself in the back corner of a room so I can watch the door. Ten years later, I still flinch every time there is a loud noise. While I have accepted that I will have to live with the mental scars of my service, I will not accept that future generations must suffer the same fate.

I am the fourth generation of my family who has served in the ADF, and I suspect I will not be the last. Our sons and daughters cannot be failed as past generations of veterans have been failed. There is no shortage of goodwill towards veterans, but goodwill alone will not address the scourge of veteran suicide. One simple step that all veterans can take is to commit to donating their brain to the Australian Veterans Brain Bank. The Veterans Brain Bank is a tissue bank that will facilitate research on disorders of the brain amongst ADF veterans. Veterans can donate their brain and, hopefully, the information gained can be used to better diagnose and support future generations of veterans. I have committed my brain to the brain bank after I die, and I encourage other veterans to also consider taking this simple but significant step. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has done its job and now it is time for governments at all levels to do their job and implement the recommendations. Anything less will be failing our veterans.