**Participant Information and Consent Form for the needs analysis focus groups**

**Project Title:** Pilot suicide awareness prevention program development and evaluation

**Principal Researcher:**
*UnitingCare Community:* Lee-Anne Borham

**Associate Researchers:**
*UnitingCare Community:* Karen Prestidge and Dr Chez Leggatt-Cook

---

This Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form tells you about the project and explains what is involved if you decide to take part in the focus group. Please read this information carefully. If you wish, talk about it with a relative or friend. Feel free to ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

If you decide to take part in this focus group:

Your information and answers to questions will be confidential and any personal details, which may identify you in any way, will not be provided to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA). Your participation will not affect any pension, benefits or health services you may currently be receiving from DVA or may receive or be entitled to in the future. Further, you may discontinue your participation in this project at any time.

1. **Introduction**

DVA conducts suicide awareness programs to increase the number of people in the ex-service community who have the skills and confidence to recognise and respond to the signs of suicide risk in others. DVA has appointed UnitingCare Community (in partnership with Overwatch Australia and Roses in the Ocean) to develop and trial a new suicide awareness training program tailored to the needs of the ex-service community. DVA has been involved in setting up this project and will continue to be involved.

The program is expected to:

- Increase understanding of suicide and suicide prevention in the target community;
- Reduce the stigma of mental health issues, particularly suicide, in the target community;
- Provide information and statistics on risks and protective factors for suicidal behaviour;
- Help people to recognise and respond to suicidal behaviour, and to refer those at risk to appropriate support services;
- Help people to understand how to care for themselves and others in risky situations; and
- Create awareness of relevant support services and resources available.
There are two ways you may have received this participant information and consent form:

1. You have been sent this form by Overwatch Australia, on behalf of UnitingCare Community, to connect us with members of the ex-service community who can assist with the program’s development; or

2. You have accessed this form through a link on a Facebook page, other social media or in a newsletter operated by DVA, the Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) or other ex-service organisations.

2. What’s involved in the focus group?

To ensure that the new training program will meet the needs of the ex-service community, UnitingCare Community will be conducting focus groups with members of the ex-service community, including ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and family members, friends, carers, and colleagues of ex-serving members of the ADF and/or civilian members of ex-service organisations.

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you have any questions or would like more information about the program please contact Lee-Anne Borham at UnitingCare Community 0407 384 414 or lee-anne.borham@uccommunity.org.au.

We would like to invite you to participate in the development of this program. We are asking you to:

- Attend a 2 hour focus group with around 12 other people and provide feedback on the program structure and content. The information you provide will ensure that the program is relevant and helpful to the ex-service community.

Some important points about your involvement:

- You must be aged 18 years or over.
- Participation involves attending a 2 hour focus group and providing the facilitator with your opinions.
- We do not expect the focus group will cause you stress or emotional distress however, you are free to suspend or end your participation at any time.
- If you choose not to be involved this will have no impact on you in any way. You can also choose to withdraw at any time.
- If you become distressed during the focus group the facilitator will ensure your immediate needs are met and arrange for you to have a quiet space to relax. If needed, the facilitator will arrange for someone to sit with you and can also support you to contact the Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) for immediate counselling support.
- If you experience any emotional distress following your participation you are encouraged to contact VVCS for support. You can also contact your GP or one of the service providers listed below.
• You will also be provided with appropriate support contacts that you can call during and after
the focus group.

If you decide you want to take part in the project and are eligible, you will be asked to sign the
consent form. You can bring the signed form with you to the focus group or there will be copies
available on the day. By signing the consent form you are telling us that you:

• Understand what you have read; and
• Consent to take part in the project by attending the focus group and providing your opinions.

When signing the consent form, you can use your given name/s or, if you prefer, you can use a
pseudonym (i.e. a made up name using a combination of mother’s maiden name and your year of
birth).

At the focus group, you will be given a signed copy of this Participant Information and Consent Form
to keep.

3. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The information you provide the project team will be used to improve future training programs.
Your participation may benefit future participants in the program and as a result, contribute to
suicide prevention in the ex-service community.

4. What are the possible risks and disadvantages of taking part?

You may feel that some of the questions asked in the focus groups or the topics discussed are
stressful or upsetting. If you become upset or distressed as a result of your participation in the focus
group, the facilitators have the expertise to support you and help you to feel safe. If you require
additional or ongoing support after the focus group, the following support options will be provided:

VVCS – 1800 011 046

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Lifeline Online Chat, via the Lifeline website – lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

Standby Bereavement Service – 0458 406 640

These contacts will also be provided on a hand out.

Any counselling or support required that is related to your participation in this project will be
provided free of charge.

5. What if I withdraw from this focus group?

Even if you consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you have enrolled to participate
in the focus group but decide later not to attend, please notify a member of the project team.
If you decide to leave the focus group, no further personal information will be collected from you, although personal information already collected will be retained to ensure that the results of the focus group can be measured properly and to comply with law. If you do not want your data to be included, you must tell the project team when you withdraw. More information about what we will do with your personal information is provided below.

6. What information will the focus group team have about me?

Note: If Overwatch Australia has contacted you to participate in this focus group, your information will only be provided to the project team if you choose to, by completing and returning the Expression of Interest (EOI) form.

There are several pieces of information the project team will obtain from you:

1. The contact information that you provide in the EOI form will be used by UnitingCare Community and VVCS to assess and confirm your participation in the project. Please note that your identifying details and contact information will be kept on file by VVCS in order to facilitate post-program support should the need arise. Your information will be stored on a secure VVCS Electronic Records Application system, and will not be provided to DVA.

2. At the focus group you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to collect demographic information and other key information (including your postcode, whether you are an ex-serving ADF member or a family member/friend/carer, how long you served, and how long you have been in civilian life post-service).

7. How will information about me be kept confidential?

As part of the EOI form, UnitingCare Community will receive consent to share your contact details with VVCS. VVCS will call you to assess and confirm your participation in the focus group. Your identifying details and contact information will be kept on file by VVCS (in the secure VVCS Electronic Records Application system) in order to facilitate post-program support should the need arise.

Personal information collected for the purpose of this focus group will not be identified with your name or other identifying information such as your address. We will collect information that will allow us to say things such as “There were ten men and five women in the focus group, ranging in age from 20-64, all of whom were ex-serving members of the ADF”.

Once the data from the focus group is entered into the project computer system we will:

- Assign a number to your data – your name will not be in the computer file; and
- The files will be kept on UnitingCare Community’s secure computer system and destroyed after seven years.

By signing the consent form to take part in the focus group, you consent to the project team collecting and using your personal information for this project only. Your information will only be used for the purpose of this project and it will not be disclosed except as required by law.

In accordance with relevant Australian privacy and other relevant laws, you have the right to request access to the information about you that is collected and stored by the project team. You also have
the right to request that any information with which you disagree be corrected. Please inform a project team member if you would like to access your information.

8. Publication of project results

It is anticipated that the results of the focus groups will be presented in a variety of ways to different groups of people interested in the results. For example, DVA or other Government departments.

If you want to be sent a copy of the project summary, we will keep your name and contact details until we have sent out the summary, then destroy the records.

In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988. This means in our report we may say: ‘A focus group participant (who was an ex-serving ADF member) told us....’ she thought including specific information on how to deal with suicidal ideation was really important’. We would not say: ‘Jane Smith said she thought including specific information on how to deal with suicidal ideation was really important’.

9. Compensation

There are no costs associated with participating in this focus group, nor will you be paid.

UnitingCare Community will receive a payment from DVA for undertaking this focus group. Project team members will not receive a personal financial benefit from your involvement in this focus group (other than their ordinary wages).

10. What happens when the project ends?

There is no follow-up planned. If you want to be sent a copy of the project summary, please complete your details on the consent form. We will keep your name and contact details (separate to your personal information questionnaire) until we have sent out the summary, then destroy the records.

11. Who has reviewed the project?

All Australian projects involving people are reviewed by an independent group called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this focus group have been approved by the HREC of DVA and the HREC of UnitingCare Queensland in accordance with their ethics review and approval procedures.

This project will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Evaluation (2007). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in focus groups such as this one.

12. Further information and who to contact

The person you will need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you want further information concerning this focus group or if you have any problems which may be related to your involvement in the focus group, you can contact the person listed below.
If you are not happy with the UnitingCare Community response and the issue is about the project in general, you can contact the DVA Project Manager listed below.

**DVA contact person**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Martha Sachse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>(07) 3223 8443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Martha.Sachse@dva.gov.au">Martha.Sachse@dva.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have any complaints about any ethical aspect of the focus group, then you may contact:

**Reviewing HREC approving this project:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewing HREC</th>
<th>DVA Human Research Ethics Committee Secretariat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Department of Veterans’ Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>PO Box 9998, CANBERRA ACT 2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ethics.committee@dva.gov.au">ethics.committee@dva.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewing HREC</th>
<th>UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>UnitingCare Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>GPO Box 45, Brisbane  QLD  4001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:HREC@ucareqld.com.au">HREC@ucareqld.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Information and Consent Form for the needs analysis focus groups

Project Title: Pilot suicide awareness prevention program

Declaration by Participant

I am aged 18 years or over.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the focus group described.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this focus group and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the focus group without affecting my future in any way.

I understand that my identifying details and contact information will be provided to VVCS and kept on file by VVCS in order to assess suitability for the focus group and to facilitate post-program support should the need arise. I understand that this information will not be provided to DVA.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) ____________________________________________________________

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

If you would like a copy of the project summary sent to you, please tick this box: ☐

So we can send the summary, please tell us your:

Email address: _____________________________________________

OR

Postal address: _____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Declaration by Project team representative†

I have given a verbal explanation of the focus group, its procedures and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Name of Project team representative† (please print) __________________________________________

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

†An appropriately qualified member of the project team must provide the explanation of, and information about the focus group.