



Australian Government
Repatriation Medical Authority

Statement of Principles
concerning
SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER
(Balance of Probabilities)
(No. 51 of 2026)

The Repatriation Medical Authority determines the following Statement of Principles under subsection 196B(3) of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*.

Dated 19 June 2026

Professor Terence Campbell AM
Chairperson
by and on behalf of
The Repatriation Medical Authority

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1 Name

This is the Statement of Principles concerning *substance use disorder (Balance of Probabilities)* (No. 51 of 2026).

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on **20 July 2026**.

3 Authority

This instrument is made under subsection 196B(3) of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*.

4 Repeal

The Statement of Principles concerning substance use disorder No. 60 of 2017 (Federal Register of Legislation No. F2017L01445) made under subsections 196B(3) and (8) of the VEA is repealed.

5 Application

This instrument applies to a claim to which section 120B of the VEA or section 339 of the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* applies.

6 Definitions

The terms defined in the Schedule 1 - Dictionary have the meaning given when used in this instrument.

7 Kind of injury, disease or death to which this Statement of Principles relates

- (1) This Statement of Principles is about substance use disorder and death from substance use disorder.

*Meaning of **substance use disorder***

- (2) For the purposes of this Statement of Principles, substance use disorder means a disorder of mental health meeting the following diagnostic criteria (derived from DSM-5-TR):

A problematic pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least 2 of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

- (a) Substances are often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended.
(b) There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control substance use.

- (c) A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain the substance, use the substance, or recover from its effects.
- (d) Craving, or a strong desire or urge to use the substance.
- (e) Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfil major role obligations at work, school, or home.
- (f) Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance.
- (g) Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of substance use.
- (h) Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous.
- (i) Substance use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the substance.
- (j) Tolerance, as defined by either of the following:
 - (i) a need for markedly increased amounts of the substance to achieve intoxication or desired effect; or
 - (ii) a markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of the substance.

Note: This criterion is not considered to be met for those individuals taking substances solely under appropriate medical supervision.

- (k) For substances other than hallucinogens or inhalants, withdrawal, as manifested by either of the following:
 - (i) the characteristic withdrawal syndrome for the substance; or
 - (ii) the substance (or a closely related substance) is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Note: This criterion is not considered to be met for those individuals taking substances solely under appropriate medical supervision.

The definition of substance use disorder excludes alcohol use disorder and substance-induced disorders in the absence of substance use disorder. Substance-induced disorders include substance intoxication, substance withdrawal, and substance-induced mental disorders.

Note: *DSM-5-TR* and *substance* are defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

- (3) While substance use disorder attracts ICD-10-AM codes F11.1, 11.2, 12.1, 12.2, 13.1, 13.2, 14.1, 14.2, 15.1, 15.2, 16.1, 16.2, 17.1, 17.2, 18.1, 18.2, 19.1, and 19.2, in applying this Statement of Principles the meaning of substance use disorder is that given in subsection (2).
- (4) For subsection (3), a reference to an ICD-10-AM code is a reference to the code assigned to a particular kind of injury or disease in *The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, Australian Modification* (ICD-10-AM),

Death from substance use disorder

- (5) For the purposes of this Statement of Principles, substance use disorder, in relation to a person, includes death from a terminal event or condition that was contributed to by the person's substance use disorder.

Note: *terminal event* is defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

8 Basis for determining the factors

On the sound medical-scientific evidence available, the Repatriation Medical Authority is of the view that it is more probable than not that substance use disorder and death from substance use disorder can be related to relevant service rendered by veterans or members of the Forces under the VEA, or members under the MRCA.

Note: *MRCA*, *relevant service* and *VEA* are defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

9 Factors that must exist

At least one of the following factors must exist before it can be said that, on the balance of probabilities, substance use disorder or death from substance use disorder is connected with the circumstances of a person's relevant service:

- (1) having one of the following clinically significant disorders of mental health at the time of clinical onset or clinical worsening:
- (a) alcohol use disorder;
 - (b) anorexia nervosa
 - (c) antisocial personality disorder;
 - (d) attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder;
 - (e) borderline personality disorder;
 - (f) binge-eating disorder;
 - (g) bipolar disorder;
 - (h) bulimia nervosa;
 - (i) cannabis use disorder;
 - (j) conduct disorder;
 - (k) gambling disorder;
 - (l) generalised anxiety disorder;
 - (m) hallucinogen use disorder;
 - (n) intermittent explosive disorder;
 - (o) major depressive disorder;
 - (p) oppositional defiant disorder;
 - (q) panic disorder;
 - (r) persistent depressive disorder;
 - (s) posttraumatic stress disorder;

- (t) prolonged grief disorder
- (u) social anxiety disorder
- (v) stimulant use disorder; or
- (w) tobacco use disorder.

Note: *clinically significant disorder of mental health* is defined in the Schedule 1 dictionary.

- (2) experiencing a category 1A stressor within the 2 years before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

Note: *category 1A stressor* is defined in the Schedule 1 - Dictionary.

- (3) experiencing a category 1B stressor within the 2 years before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

Note: *category 1B stressor* is defined in the Schedule 1 - Dictionary.

- (4) experiencing a category 2 stressor within the 6 months before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

Note 1: A category 2 stressor can arise in a variety of circumstances connected with service. Such circumstances can arise during the course of service, as a result of separation from service and the conditions associated with that separation, and in the transition to civilian life in the years following separation.

Note 2: *category 2 stressor* is defined in the Schedule 1 - Dictionary.

- (5) experiencing the death of a person with whom one has a close family bond or a close personal relationship, within the 5 years before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

- (6) having experienced as a child (under the age of 18) one of the following:

- (a) serious physical, emotional, or sexual harm;
- (b) neglect involving a serious failure to provide the necessities for health, physical and emotional development, or wellbeing by adults with obligations to provide such necessities;

before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

- (7) taking a medically prescribed substance from the same pharmacological class as the diagnosed substance use disorder, at the time of clinical onset;

- (8) experiencing intimate partner violence within the 2 years before clinical onset or clinical worsening;

Note: *intimate partner violence* is defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

- (9) inability to obtain appropriate clinical management for substance use disorder before clinical worsening.

10 Relationship to service

- (1) The existence in a person of any factor referred to in section 9, must be related to the relevant service rendered by the person.

- (2) The clinical worsening aspect of factors set out in section 9 apply only to material contribution to, or aggravation of, substance use disorder where the person's substance use disorder was suffered or contracted before or during (but did not arise out of) the person's relevant service.

11 Factors referring to an injury or disease covered by another Statement of Principles

In this Statement of Principles:

- (1) if a factor referred to in section 9 applies in relation to a person; and
- (2) that factor refers to an injury or disease in respect of which a Statement of Principles has been determined under subsection 196B(3) of the VEA;

then the factors in that Statement of Principles apply in accordance with the terms of that Statement of Principles as in force from time to time.

Schedule 1 - Dictionary

Note: See Section 6

1 Definitions

In this instrument:

category 1A stressor means one of the following severe traumatic events:

- (a) experiencing a life-threatening event;
- (b) being subject to a serious physical attack, or assault including rape or sexual molestation;
- (c) being threatened with a weapon, being held captive, being kidnapped, or being tortured.

category 1B stressor means one of the following severe traumatic events:

- (a) killing or maiming a person;
- (b) being a witness to a person being killed or critically injured;
- (c) being a witness to atrocities inflicted on another person;
- (d) witnessing human remains or a critically injured casualty, excluding seeing a closed body bag or viewing a body in an open-casket.

Note: *witness* is defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

category 2 stressor means one of the following negative life events, the effects of which are chronic in nature and cause the person to feel on-going distress, concern or worry:

- (a) being a full-time caregiver to a family member or a person with whom one has a close family bond or a close personal relationship with a severe physical, mental or developmental disability;
- (b) being socially isolated and unable to maintain friendships or family relationships, due to physical location, language barriers, disability, or medical or psychiatric illness;
- (c) experiencing adverse prejudicial differential treatment or unequal access to opportunities based on membership to a particular sociocultural group (racism);
- (d) experiencing a problem with a long-term relationship including the break-up of a close personal relationship, the need for marital or relationship counselling, marital separation, or divorce;
- (e) having concerns in the work environment including on-going disharmony with fellow work colleagues, perceived lack of social support within the work environment, perceived lack of control over tasks performed and stressful workloads, or experiencing bullying in the workplace or school environment;
- (f) experiencing prejudice or discrimination based on gender identity, or behaviour or attitudes that foster stereotyped social roles based on gender identity (sexism);
- (g) experiencing prejudice or discrimination based on sexual orientation, or behaviour or attitudes that foster stereotyped social roles based on sexual orientation;

- (h) experiencing serious legal issues including being detained or held in custody, on-going involvement with the police concerning violations of the law, or court appearances associated with personal legal problems;
- (i) having severe financial hardship including loss of employment, long periods of unemployment, foreclosure on a property or bankruptcy;
- (j) having a family member or a person with whom one has a close family bond or a close personal relationship experience a major deterioration in their health?
- (k) having a medical illness or injury which has resulted in a severe level of physical or cognitive disability.

clinically significant disorder of mental health means a disorder of mental health which is of sufficient severity to warrant ongoing management.

Note: To warrant ongoing management does not require that any actual management was received or given for the condition.

DSM-5-TR means the American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition. Text Revision Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2022.

intimate partner means a person who is or has been in an intimate relationship with another person.

intimate partner violence means behaviour within an intimate relationship perpetrated by an intimate partner that causes or has the capacity to cause physical, sexual, economic or psychological harm. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- (a) violence;
- (b) threats;
- (c) harmful behaviours or threats of harmful behaviours directed towards a child, animal or another adult;
- (d) neglect where there is a relationship of dependence
- (e) coercion;
- (f) stalking;
- (g) humiliation;
- (h) restriction of access to education, employment or medical care; or
- (i) isolation from family, friends or colleagues.

Note 1: ***intimate relationship*** is defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

Note 2: ***intimate partner*** is defined in the Schedule 1 – Dictionary.

intimate relationship means a relationship that involves emotional and/or physical closeness and interdependence between people. Purely commercial relationships are excluded from this definition.

MRCAs means the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*.

relevant service means:

- (a) eligible war service (other than operational service) under the VEA;
- (b) defence service (other than hazardous service and British nuclear test defence service) under the VEA; or
- (c) peacetime service under the MRCA.

Note: *MRCA* and *VEA* are defined in the Schedule 1 - Dictionary.

substance means any of the following substances, alone or in combination:

- (a) cannabis, including cannabis derivatives;
- (b) hallucinogens, including phencyclidines, phenylalkylamines, MDMA, psilocybin, and LSD;
- (c) inhalants, including volatile hydrocarbons;
- (d) opioids, including morphine, codeine, heroin, oxycodone, methadone, tramadol, and fentanyl;
- (e) sedatives, hypnotics, or anxiolytics, including benzodiazepines, carbamates, and barbiturates;
- (f) stimulants, including amphetamines, cocaine, MDMA, and khat;
- (g) tobacco; or
- (h) other substances, including anabolic steroids, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroids, antiparkinsonian medications, antihistamines, nitrous oxide, amyl-, butyl-, or isobutyl-nitrites, betel nut, and kava.

substance use disorder—see subsection 7(2).

terminal event means the proximate or ultimate cause of death and includes the following:

- (a) pneumonia;
- (b) respiratory failure;
- (c) cardiac arrest;
- (d) circulatory failure; or
- (e) cessation of brain function.

VEA means the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*.

witness means a person who experiences an incident at the time it occurs and can give direct evidence of it. This excludes persons exposed only to public broadcasting or mass media coverage of the incident.