

Question on notice no. 359

Portfolio question number: 97

Additional estimates

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, Defence Portfolio

Senator Jordon Steele-John: asked the Australian War Memorial on 4 March 2020

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(4. The former Director of the War Memorial said that the Memorial could provide a 'therapeutic milieu' for recently returned veterans. What evidence is there that it can do this? Does the Memorial have evidence that other war museums have served a similar purpose?

Answer —

Answer attached

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**Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Additional Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 4 March 2020
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

Question 97

**Outcome: All Program: All
Topic: Therapeutic benefits
(Written Question on Notice)**

Senator Jordon Steele-John asked:

The former Director of the War Memorial said that the Memorial could provide a 'therapeutic milieu' for recently returned veterans. What evidence is there that it can do this? Does the Memorial have evidence that other war museums have served a similar purpose?

Answer

The Memorial is unique, and is an archive, museum and a shrine, not simply telling the story of war and operation, but commemorating the lives of those who served.

The 'therapeutic milieu' referred to consists of the broad social support and mechanisms beyond direct medical or psychological treatment for veterans. This includes ex-service organisations, veterans' advocacy groups, kindred organisations and other social constructs.

It is the view of the Memorial that it has an important role to play in this regard to help contemporary veterans to find meaning in their experience and help them communicate those experiences to their families and the public so that they can better understand and support our veterans. The Memorial seeks appropriate guidance and assistance in relation to veterans' centred programs that it runs, such as the 'Soldiers in Residence' program, to ensure best practices are adhered to.

It is important to note that the Memorial is not providing treatment for veterans nor does it claim to. This is clearly the role of the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs and to professional medical services. The Memorial however is a part of the broad support network for our veterans and their families and indeed has been since its inception.

There is a considerable body of evidence, including examples provided below, that highlights the importance of social support to veterans in relation to positive health outcomes. Further, as referenced in The National Arts and Health Framework there is a growing body of research and academic study of 'museums as therapeutic agents', and of the arts and cultural activities more generally in terms of their potential to improve health outcomes.

The Memorial is not aware of any specific research conducted in relation to war museums and veterans' health, but there is a growing body of research related to veterans' art therapy and public displays, such as the Memorial's annual Napier Waller Art Prize, and the role that this can play in veterans' health.

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References: The Role of the Arts and Museums in Health

The National Arts and Health Framework

Australian Government

[<https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1761/f/National%20Arts%20and%20Health%20Framework%20May%202014.pdf>]

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The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, Vol.27, pp. 98 – 103

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