

# Veterans' PTSD win

EXCLUSIVE  
WES HOSKING

## Hi-tech test can deliver simple diagnosis

MELBOURNE researchers are developing a hi-tech test to diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans.

A new study — the first of its kind — will use cameras to analyse veterans' skin temperature, heart rate and breathing.

Their eye movement will also be monitored, as well as how much they sweat when talking about traumatic events.

Up to one in five veterans will develop PTSD, but the debilitating condition often

goes undiagnosed because it's hard to detect. Typically, it takes between eight and 10 years before someone is diagnosed and gets treatment.

Phoenix Australia head of research Professor Meaghan O'Donnell, overseeing the study, told the Herald Sun: "This is the first time a lot of this technology has been used clinically. It's very unique."

About 50 veterans and emergency services workers who suspect they have PTSD will be recruited for the study,

led by Phoenix Australia psychiatrist Rahul Khanna at the University of Melbourne.

Thermal cameras will measure unconscious body reactions when veterans are asked to talk about traumatic events they've experienced.

Special software will measure their facial expressions during the assessment.

"At the moment the way we diagnose PTSD is by using clinical interviews, and patients report whether they've got certain symptoms," Prof

O'Donnell said. "We don't really have objective markers of diagnosis. It's particularly difficult for PTSD as often the symptoms are hard to describe and it is left to the clinician's expertise to diagnose.

"This assessment would happen pretty automatically. The idea is to get this signal that is specific to PTSD.

"It will help us diagnose PTSD more accurately, and if you get the diagnosis right, then you're more likely to get the appropriate treatment."

Between 5 and 20 per cent of veterans will develop PTSD — double the rate in the general public. About 8 per cent of serving defence personnel experience PTSD in a given year.

Veterans Minister Shaun Leane is pushing for mental health support to be a key focus in the newly announced royal commission into veteran

suicides, with the state government providing \$1.5m for recent upgrades to Phoenix's research facilities.

"Veterans have served our country and it is our duty to stand by them — this funding is part of the work we're doing to support veterans and their mental health and wellbeing," Mr Leane said.

Veterans and first responders who suspect they have PTSD and wish to be part of the research can phone Phoenix's traumatic stress clinic on 1800 514 905 or email phoenix-clinic@unimelb.edu.au

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