



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table February 2024

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Wednesday 28 February, 2024. A range of issues were discussed during the meeting.

DVA update – Secretary Alison Frame

Secretary Frame discussed the importance of working together to showcase the positive strides being made to improve services and programs to veterans and families, including elimination of the claims backlog and ongoing legislative reform. The Secretary highlighted the need to build confidence in the veteran community, that DVA is here to help and called on members to actively work within their organisations to be an open communication channel for feedback on improving services and programs. She pointed out the need for DVA to be proactive with good news stories and to share these with the veteran community through ESOs and other stakeholders.

Claims processing update

Members were provided an update on the progress that DVA has made in addressing Recommendation 4 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Interim Report. DVA cleared the unallocated backlog in February 2024. The backlog, as defined by the Royal Commission, is any claim that is awaiting allocation for processing. The expansion of computer-based decision making for acceptances in claims processing was also discussed.

Legislative Reform update

Members listened to the Minister's announcement releasing the *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2023 – Exposure Draft* today. Members noted the proposed implementation date of 1 July 2026, from which all future claims would be considered under MRCA, and existing claims under the VEA would be grand-parented. Members discussed the consultation phase, with feedback required by 28 April 2024. Members were encouraged to discuss the Exposure Draft with members of their organisation and noted hard copies of the information booklet will be made available. The Legislation Reform team is also very happy to meet with any stakeholders to discuss the Exposure Draft Bill. More information on the proposed legislation and the link to make a submission can be found at <https://www.dva.gov.au/about/royal-commission/veterans-legislation-reform-exposure-draft-consultation>

Modernisation Program and MyService enhancements

Members were updated on DVA's modernisation work, including enhancements to MyService. Members were advised that while testing of internal DVA systems is currently confined to DVA staff, system enhancements are co-designed with the veteran community. Members noted a discovery piece of work on the ESO portal is underway and the summary report will be provided to ESORT. Members were also provided with an update on computer based decision making for straightforward claims that are decision ready and that this applies to acceptances only, with any potential rejections being referred for delegate consideration.

Hearing services

Veterans with complex hearing needs continue to be a focus for DVA, noting the Department's commitment to support devices not covered by the Hearing Services Program. Results from the Veteran Hearing and Wellbeing survey will further help to inform future improvements. Members were updated on initiatives that will better support veterans and families in this space, including DVA's collaboration with the National Acoustics Laboratory and the Government Review of the Hearing Services Program.

Aged care

DVA's Aged and Community Care Taskforce commenced on 15 January 2024. Members were provided with an overview of the Taskforce, which is to develop and deliver:

- short-term responses to current market pressures facing VHC and Community Nursing
- options for improving sustainability in VHC and Community Nursing services, in partnership with DoHAC and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- improvements in supporting members of the veteran community as they transition to, or are already in, residential aged care; working with stakeholders on communication, information and support; and ensuring that residential aged-care facilities are equipped to support veterans, maximising the supports available and recognising their veteran or war widow/er status
- a DVA capability to assist and support veterans and families approaching the transition into aged care and navigating that complex eco-system.

Members also noted the member submission on this subject.

Booked Car With Driver

Members discussed a member's submission on the eligibility for the Booked Car with Driver scheme when a veteran needs to be collected from hospital. DVA will be conducting further training of its staff, particularly in relation to client eligibility for those who are under the age of 80, based on feedback provided by members at the meeting.

DVA card and fee schedules

Members discussed a member's submission in relation to the DCA card and fee schedules. Decisions to amend price-setting arrangements for DVA-funded health care services are subject to any government decisions in the Budget. There was discussion on the benefits of in encouraging greater use of prior approval arrangements as the service provider is paid up front and there cannot be a gap payment sought from the veteran. DVA agreed to provide a form of words that can be shared with ESOs to encourage increased and simpler use of prior approvals where they are needed.

IGDAF 20-Year Review

Members noted a member's submission and discussed concerns for Afghanistan veterans.

Veterans' MATES Program

Members discussed a member's submission on this subject. Members noted that all White and Gold Card holders will receive a written update on the MATES program. Members discussed how privacy and ethics have changed over time, and noted the importance of ongoing governance and safeguarding of information. Members noted all data obtained by the program is DVA data and will not be retained by the University of South Australia.

OneESO

Members were updated on the proposal for an Ex-Service Organisation peak body and informed that a consultant is being engaged to assess the advantages and disadvantages as part of a business case. Members noted they would be contacted by the consultants seeking their views and that of their organisations.

Grants reform

The approach that DVA is taking to improve the community grants process was discussed with Members. DVA is considering the final report from the Grants Review that was conducted in late 2023. DVA acknowledges the limited grant funds available and is committed to partnering with ESOs and the wider community to maximise funds available by structuring grants to improve flexibility to target key areas of need. Members were given an overview of the changes made to the Veteran Wellbeing Grant, as well as an update on the audit into adherence to the BEST Service Standards.

Co-Design/Consultation Calendar

Members were updated on new forums to increase engagement with the veteran community on a range of issues. Six new consultative forums, which will be open to all members of the veteran community, will be held in 2024, with the first forum to take place on 9 April. ESORT will continue to be updated on these forums.

Advocacy

DVA acknowledges the importance of advocacy services and the keen interest that Members have in this area. Governance of advocacy services is key to how DVA and the ESO community can work together to maintain credible, reliable and professional advocacy services. Members were provided an overview of the Communication Strategy to promote free ESO advisory services, the Claims Assistance Pilot, the ATDP, and an update on Piloting information sharing between DVA and ESO advocates.

Anzac Day Engagement Program

Anzac Day remains one of Australia's most important national occasions. DVA is committed to ensuring that the importance, and the poignancy of Anzac Day is acknowledged by all Australians, young and old. Members were advised of the independent review into Anzac Day services in France and Türkiye, and opportunities to increase community involvement in the delivery of these commemorative services.