



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

REVIEW OF DVA-FUNDED ESO ADVOCACY AND WELFARE SERVICES EMERGING THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUPS

The emerging themes that are summarised below represent broad observations by the Review team who are continuing their detailed consideration of the views that they have received through both written submissions and in the face to face discussions that have been held.

- From discussions held ESOs show a clear understanding of the need to move to a model or models that support an integrated approach to the delivery of services. Points made in support of Veteran Support Centres include:
 - recognition that resources (human and equipment) need to be optimised;
 - funding needs to match the service needs of veterans in particular locations;
 - establishment of new Centres may need specific additional support; and
 - any new model or models need to have regard to the needs of veterans in all locations.
- There has been recognition that grant assessment processes need to recognise the capacity of ESOs to contribute to total service costs whilst taking into account the variable levels of ESO and other sponsor support that are available.
- The Review team has been made aware of strong support for the TIP program. Observations made have included:
 - a need for all course offerings to be widely available;
 - enthusiasm for E-learning developments and support to extend these both in overall program scope and geographical reach;
 - recognition of the need for some level of accreditation but concerns regarding adoption of a full accreditation framework (ie Registered Training Organisations, TAFE etc);
 - national consistency (with flexibility for State requirements) of program design is desirable rather than individual State designs;
 - both attendance and competency need to be certified and advice provided to ESOs;
 - need for DVA feedback regarding quality of claims – linked to TIP refresher training for practitioner/s; and
 - a tiered structure could be aligned with the differing levels of TIP trained officers.
- Throughout the Review reference has been made to the challenges that present themselves both in terms of the increasing complexity of the needs of veterans and the legislation framework/s.

- Comment has been made to the Review team about the need to have better informed processes for grants and for assessments to be more evidence based. This involves the need for better data (eg ESO membership numbers is not a valid basis compared to numbers of veterans supported and services provided), development of work load indicators, assessment of applications (eg the validity of data provided) and reporting processes.
- There has been a very high level of recognition at all levels for the importance of transparency and accountability in the management of BEST, TIP and V&C grants.
- Discussions and submissions reflect support for volunteerism whilst also recognising the need to retain and provide skilled advocacy and other services. There is a clear understanding of the need to get the right balance of paid versus unpaid personnel as services to veterans transition to the future.
- The Review has noted that there are concerns about aligning the notion of a tiered model to simply paid versus unpaid. At the same time it is evident that more complex work may, over time, be increasingly conducted by paid personnel.
- The extent of demographic challenges have been frequently mentioned. These can be located on a continuum with the needs of younger veterans at one end and the increasing need for effective referral to aged care/community services at the other.
- Throughout the Review, there has been a level of interest in changes to funding cycles, funding criteria and administrative arrangements – for example, recurrent funding with yearly reviews, timeliness of funds allocation, rolling programs together, keeping grants to National and State ESOs discrete.
- There has been general acceptance of current arrangements for V&CG but mention has been made of the need to consider both current funding criteria and to evaluate the outcomes that are being achieved.
- Forms and documentation have attracted a great deal of comment. These vary and at one level there are concerns about the demands that are placed on volunteers whilst the need has also been expressed for more guidance and prescription in completing documentation, eg around welfare reporting.
- There has been a number of views expressed about the Veterans Practitioner Activity Data base (VPAD). These have been around the extent to which it is used or not and the reasons why, the need for enhancements to proceed and the level of ongoing support that is necessary. These comments have been made in the context of a broader discussion of the need for IT systems to inform funding, activities and acquittal processes.