**Minutes**

### Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting acknowledging country, veterans, current serving Australian Defence Force Personnel and families. Members **NOTED** there were no conflicts of interest raised and **NOTED** apologies and attendees as listed at Annexure A.

**Agenda Item 2 Previous Minutes & Actions**

Members **ENDOSRSED** the Minutes from the 28 February 2023 meeting.

Members **AGREED** to close Action items 2023OWP/A1, 2023OWP/A2, 2023OWP/A3, 2023OWP/A4, 2023OWP/A5, 2023OWP/A6 and 2023OWP/A7.

Members were provided an update on Action item 2022OWP/A25 and **NOTED** the complexities of aged care and the need to communicate more broadly. Members **AGREED** to close Action item 2022OWP/A25 while ensuring there is a focus on investigating the best way to communicate to different cohorts.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A8** | Business area to investigate with Communications Branch different channels of communication for different cohorts in the ex-service community regarding aged care. | **Program Delivery** |
| **2023OWP/A9** | Access to aged care report from The Royal Australian Regiment Association to be submitted to ESORT. | **Secretariat** |

Members **DISCUSSED** the Department’s plan for a Veteran and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and **NOTED** the NCF Forums will be invited to comment.

**Agenda Item 2.1 2023OWP/A4 – Report back: MRCA & Aged Care Income and Assets Assessment**

Members were provided an update on 2023OWP/A4 and **NOTED** the complexities involved with manifest eligibility and the need to discuss further with Services Australia, which is the owner of the instrument due to its assessment of the disability pension. Members **AGREED** to close Action item 2023OWP/A4 with further actions and offline discussions to occur.

Members **DISCUSSED** the Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP) and change in process that has occurred. Members **NOTED** the importance of ensuring that veterans are aware of the conditions of offer with SRDP. Members **AGREED** that the current letter and email needs to be reviewed by the Communications Branch and Chief Counsel prior to being circulated to OWP members.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A10** | DVA to discuss with Services Australia the ability to change/amend its instrument regarding the Aged Care Income Assets Assessment. | **Client Benefits** |
| **2023OWP/A11** | DVA to discuss offline with TPI Federation and Australian War Widows representatives about SRDP, MRCA & Aged Care Income Assets Assessment and war widow compensation as income. | **Client Benefits** |
| **2023OWP/A12** | Out of session paper on SRDP to be circulated to OWP members regarding the complaints received, what the new email and letter entails, details on number of veterans eligible for SRDP and how many received 50 points to determine scale of affected individuals. DVA to review its website to ensure correct information is provided. | **Client Benefits** |
| **2023OWP/A13** | Item to be placed on November 2023 OWP meeting agenda regarding Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP). | **Secretariat** |

**Agenda Item 3 Advocacy Reform Update**

Members were updated and **NOTED** thatDVA is continuing work with the Ex-Service Organisation Roundtable (ESORT) to consider ways of supporting claims assistance for veterans and families, with the establishment of a working group to develop principles and standards for claims assistance for veterans and their families.

Members **NOTED** the working group aims to agree on the principles and standards expected of Advocates assisting veterans and their families, and will report back to ESORT at its September 2023 meeting.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of having a consistent and professional level of support to veterans seeking claims assistance and **NOTED** the need to continue updating the Advocate Training and Development Program (ATDP) and offerings within.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A14** | Provide an email address to OWP members to enable any comments or feedback on Advocacy. | **Secretariat** |

**Agenda Item 4 Veterans’ and Families’ Hubs**

Members **NOTED** the update and **DISCUSSED** the expansion of the Veterans’ and Families’ Hubs network beyond the six established hubs. Members **NOTED** progress that has been made and how this will support the veteran community.

**Agenda Item 5 Medical Forms Review Project Update**

Members received an update on the work underway in the Medical Forms Review Project to consolidate the number of forms used and streamline processes to prepare for a digitised environment. Members **NOTED** a taskforce has been established to accelerate the delivery of updated forms by early 2024.

Members **NOTED** the progress to date and that final versions of the revised forms will be placed on the DVA website in tranches. Members were encouraged to provide any feedback, including on those forms already completed, via email to Sally Dennington via [sally.dennington@dva.gov.au](mailto:sally.dennington@dva.gov.au).

**Agenda Item 5.1 Thoracolumbar Spondylosis – New SOP**

Members **NOTED** the update provided on the new Statement of Principles (SOP) for Thoracolumbar Spondylosis.

Members **DISCUSSED** that existing conditions will remain in place and **NOTED** the changes that have occurred.

**Agenda Item 6 Travel Entitlements: Rate of Reimbursement for use of Private Vehicle**

Members **NOTED** the information provided on travel for treatment, acknowledging there are differences more broadly in travel rates across DVA’s legislation. Members **DISCUSSED** their concernsregarding ‘closest practical provider’ and **NOTED** the complexities andinconsistencies between the Acts.

Members **NOTED** there have been calls to apply the more generous features under each of the schemes to all veterans, and this issue will form part of the advice DVA is providing to the Government about how it might implement its proposed pathway. Along with the other changes proposed, this would need to be considered in the Budget context.

**Agenda Item 7 Differences between Household Services and Veterans Home Care**

Members **NOTED** the update and **DISCUSSED** the differences in services available through Veterans Home Care (VHC) and Household Services are due to the different legislative intents and underpinning principles of the programs. Members **NOTED** the consultation process has just been completed seeking views from veterans and their families about establishing an improved version of the MRCA as the sole ongoing scheme.

**Agenda Item 8 Legislative Reform Pathway Update**

Members **NOTED** the update on the proposed Legislation Reform Pathway and that the Government is working towards the timeframe outlined in the Royal Commission's Interim Report of having new legislation operational by 1 July 2025 and **NOTED** that another round of consultation is likely to take place on an exposure draft in early 2024.

**Agenda Item 8.1 Grandfathering of VEA**

Members **NOTED** the update on Grandfathering and the differences in how compensation is paid under the MRCA and the VEA. Members **DISCUSSED** the supports and services provided to entitled veterans and their families are overwhelmingly similar.

**Agenda Item 9 Modernisation Update**

Members **NOTED** the update and that DVA will continue to provide ongoing improvement to deliver efficient claims processing services to the veteran community before June 2024. Members were advised the Advocacy Support 1300 phone number will be decommissioned and new 1800 numbers have been introduced.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A15** | Investigate where the 1300 number has been diverted to and provide advice that can be distributed through members/ESO’s advocacy networks. | **Chief Information Officer** |
| **2023OWP/A16** | Advice to be provided on the possibility/feasibility for messaging to be put on DVA website regarding “speak to an Advocate first”. | **Client Benefits** |
| **2023OWP/A17** | Investigation into the use of generic email boxes for standard items. | **Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience** |

**Agenda Item 10 Claims Processing Update**

Members received an update on the claims backlog and **NOTED** the increase in staff engaged to reduce the backlog in Initial Liability (IL) cases. Members **DISCUSSED** advice that the time to process will continue to reduce based on productivity improvements and that application rate has stabilised. Members also discussed investigation into considering ex-service injury/illness claims before serving claims.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A18** | Come back to OWP in November 2023 with a spreadsheet on confirmed claims that have been finalised. | **Client Benefits** |
| **2023OWP/A19** | Air Force Association member invited to provide a list of claims to Client Benefits that are of concern. | **Air Force Association** |

**Agenda Item 10.1 Multi-Act Assessment**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member’s submission.

**Agenda Item 10.2 Criterion For Escalation To Have Claim Considered Urgently**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member’s submission.

**Agenda Item 11 DFRDB & MSBS Invalidity Pension Definition**

Members **NOTED** the update on the Douglas decision, and Schedule 9 of the Treasury Laws Amendment (2022 Measures No. 4) Bill 2022 do not impact provisions requiring offset of Commonwealth-funded superannuation from incapacity payments under the DRCA and MRCA. Members **DISCUSSED** concerns regarding the impact of the Douglas decision and the viability of offsetting superannuation belongs to the individual, not the Commonwealth.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A20** | TPI Federation representative to write an email with the details of definitions to ensure they are correct and provide to DVA to receive a departmental response. | **TPI Federation and Policy & Research** |

**Agenda Item 12 Hearing Services for Veterans**

Members **NOTED** the update on Hearing Services and that DVA continues to look at opportunities to improve hearing services for veterans. Members **DISCUSSED** the complex needs of veterans and how DVA could provide timely decisions that align with the wellbeing framework.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A21** | Provide OWP members with a copy of the criteria/form to determine clinical needs for hearing devices. Business area to report back on “how you determine clinical need”. | **Program Delivery** |
| **2023OWP/A22** | Information to be provided to DVA from the Returned & Services League of Australia representative on instances where the delegate approves hearing aids, however, subsequently the relevant state does not provide funding. | **Returned & Services League of Australia** |

**Agenda Item 13 Other business**

The Royal Australian Regiment Association representative raised concerns around medical attention and those not residing in the location of the treating specialist. Members **NOTED** there are no real definitions under this legislation for normal treating doctor and they are developing a practice for claim reports.

Mr Graeme Bland, representative of the Air Force Association Ltd advised the Chair and OWP members that he would be resigning from his role and will no longer be a member of OWP. The Chair thanked Mr Bland for his contribution to the forum.

**Agenda Item 14 Wholly Dependent Partner/Defence Widow**

Members **NOTED** the information provided on the legislative basis for the terms describing partners’ compensation, and it was **NOTED** the concerns around the revised wording being unclear that you are a widow/widower. Members **AGREED** that the departmental response covered the submission and **NOTED** that advice will be provided around the wording that will appear on cards.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A23** | DVA to review what wording in relation to Wholly Dependent Partner/Defence Widow that will appear on any DVA cards. | **Policy & Research** |

**Agenda Item 15 Authority to Act**

Members raised concerns regarding the amount of forms that are required to be completed to become a nominated representative of a veteran, and **NOTED** the work currently happening in the information access space. Members **NOTED** the departmental response that was provided on the topic.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A24** | DVA to look into the right process and required forms for nominated veteran representatives and gaining information when an individual has been given the Authority to Act. | **Client Benefits** |

**Agenda Item 16 Unprofessional Correspondence**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member’s submission.

**Agenda Item 17 Client Benefit Survey and address usage**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member’s submission.

**Agenda Item 18 Suspect Scam**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member’s submission.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **2023OWP/A25** | Advice to be provided on an alternative solution, if applicable, for members who regularly face issues when accessing the DVA secure email network. | **Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience** |

**Agenda Item 19 Australian Physiotherapy Association DVA Campaign for Higher Fees**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and the current focus placed on the issue and **AGREED** it addressed the members submission.

**The meeting closed at 2:35pm**

**Annexure A**

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| **MEMBERS/ATTENDEES** | |  |
| Ms Kate Pope PSM (Chair) | Deputy Secretary, Veterans and Families Services Group | |
| Ms Natasha Cole (Deputy Chair) | First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division | |
| Mr Graeme Bland | Air Force Association Ltd | |
| Mr Michael Carlon | Australian Special Air Service Association | |
| Mr John McNeill | Australian Veterans Alliance | |
| Ms Pat McCabe OAM | TPI Federation Australia | |
| Ms Jenny Gregory OAM | Australian War Widows Inc | |
| Mr Bill Roberts OAM JP | Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia | |
| Mr John King | Returned & Services League of Australia | |
| Mr Mike Benyk | Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (proxy) | |
| Mr Clem Russell OAM | Royal Australian Regiment Association | |
| Ms Evette House | Partners of Veterans Association *(proxy)* | |
| **Presenters** | |  |
| Alison McLaren | A/g Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience – *Item 8* | |
| Kerrie-Anne Luscombe | General Counsel – *Item 3* | |
| David Pullen | First Assistant Secretary, Claims Process Improvement – *Item 10* | |
| Sarah Kennedy | Assistant Secretary, Client Programs – *Items 2 & 12* | |
| Sally Dennington | A/g Assistant Secretary, Business Improvement & Quality Assurance – *Item 8* | |
| Luke Brown | Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform – *Items 8 & 14* | |
| Simon Hill | Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform – *Items 8 & 14* | |
| Michael Harper | Assistant Secretary, VEA Compensation & Support – *Item 3* | |
| Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar | Assistant Secretary, Hubs – *Item 4* | |
| Laura Sham | Assistant Secretary, Chief Information Officer Branch – *Item 9* | |
| Brian Eastman | A/g Assistant Secretary, Benefits Policy Branch – *Item 11* | |
| Jude V | Director, Liability & Service Eligibility Section – *Item 5.1* | |
| Wendy C | Director, Benefits & Payments – *Item 11* | |
| **Observers** | |  |
| Liane Pettitt | A/g First Assistant Secretary, Engagement, Communications & Ministerial | |
| Nick R | Graduate, International & Stakeholder Relations | |
| **Secretariat** | |  |
| Ms Belinda B | Director, International & Stakeholder Relations | |
| Ms Morgan S | A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations | |
| Ms Karen G | Senior Secretariat Officer International & Stakeholder Relations | |
| Mr Jack M | Secretariat Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations | |
| **Apologies** | |  |
| Ms Rona Lunney | Partners of Veterans Association | |
| Mr Max Ball | Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia | |
| Mr Rod Hutchings | Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association | |
| Mr Ray Kemp OAM JP | Naval Association of Australia | |
| Mr Robert Connor | Legacy Australia Inc | |