Department of Veterans' Affairs │ 2023 APS Employee Census Action Plan

The Australian Public Service (APS) Employee Census is an annual employee perception survey that captures confidential attitude and opinion data from APS employees on important issues in the workplace. It is an opportunity for APS employees to share their experiences of working in the APS and their department. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (the department/DVA) has gained valuable insights from the results and through consultation with all staff, has developed four key priorities for focus for the next 12 months. The department has established four working groups each being led by an SES Band 1 to help progress the department's commitment to taking action and improving the working environment. Results will be tracked and reviewed and tested against future census results.

What we are doing well

Connection to Purpose & Employee Engagement

Employees generally feel a strong connection to the purpose of and objectives of DVA (86%) and are committed to the agency goals (85%). Ninety-two per cent (92%) of employees understand how their role contributes to achieving an outcome for the Australian Public and 91% are happy to go the extra mile at work when required. Eighty-two per cent (82%) see a direct connection with their work and DVA's wellbeing outcomes for veterans and families.

The Employee Engagement index score remained relatively stable at 74% (down 1% from 2022). This stability is significant for DVA during a time where a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has entered into the end of its second year.

Flexible Work & Inclusion

The department's flexible working policies continue to support staff to balance their work and personal commitments, and employees feel they have reasonable flexibility to help them manage operational requirements across diverse ways of working. Supervisors are generally supportive of flexible working practices with 78% of staff advising they felt confident requests for flexible working arrangements would be given reasonable consideration. Seventy-two per cent (72%) of staff have some form of remote working arrangements in place (i.e. 15% higher than other APS agencies).

Seventy-eight per cent (78%)of staff feel the department supports and actively promotes an inclusive workplace culture, and supervisors scored highly for ensuring everyone can be included in workplace activities (81%).

Opportunities for Improvement

Burnout

Approximately a third of staff find their work emotionally draining and purport feelings of burn out (33% agree or strongly agree to feeling burnt out by work and a further 32% remain neutral). When asked about workload, 66% of staff say they were operating at slightly above or well above capacity. There is an opportunity to understand which areas within the department report higher feelings of burnout and what staff mean when they say they feel burnt out.

Innovation

All questions that form the innovation index score (63%) have gone down. While staff believe they have responsibility to look for improvements to their work, they don't generally feel supported, motivated or recognised for doing so (i.e. 19% of staff don't feel DVA Recognises failure as part of innovation with a further 44% remaining neutral). There is an opportunity to build a culture which fosters innovation, and one where people are recognised for their contribution and efforts.

Organisational Change

There is an opportunity to improve organisational change practices, in particular employee experience with change. Only 48% of staff felt consulted about change at work, and only 57% felt communication was effective. Twenty-eight per cent (28%) of staff feel change is not managed well and a further 31% are neutral. Understanding how staff want to be consulted and developing tools to assist with this is an important step to improving their experience with organisational change.

Tools and Resources

Technology is the largest barrier for staff with 40% saying this impacts them to a great extent. Over a quarter of DVA staff say they don't have the tools or resources to perform well (i.e. 25% felt their workgroup did not have the tools and resources needed to perform well, with 19% remaining neutral). Exploring improved IT options will be a considered focus over the next 12 months.

3,076 of 3,822 Responses received (80%)

2023 DVA CENSUS ACTION PLAN

What are the key actions we need to take to equip our staff to be their best and to support our clients

THEME	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE
BURNOUT	**Further analysis to identify areas within the business that report higher feelings of burnout and develop action plans to address these**	• A clearer definition of burnout in DVA, the factors underpinning it, and a linked package of supports for managers to proactively engage in prevention. • Improvements to the DVA staff Census scores relating to: I feel burned out by my work; I have unrealistic time pressures; My agency does a good job of communicating what it can offer me in terms of health and wellbeing; I think my agency cares about my health and wellbeing. • Reduction in excessive leave balances at a division-level (driven by leave utilisation, not deeming). • Increased staff retention rates. • Increased awareness of DVA support services.
TOOLS & RESOURCES	**Exploration of improved IT options**	• Improvements in productivity and retention. • All users (DVA staff, advocates, veterans) have access to accurate, up-to-date information. • Technology scores for the 2024 Census are improved.
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE	**Improve staff experience with Organisational Change practices in DVA**	• Improved scores around change management and communication of change in the 2024 census. • A change management framework is developed and implemented. • A change management toolkit is developed. • Amend existing responsibilities and behaviours in performance agreement templates to include indicators on how EL and SES staff demonstrate examples of communicating change to their teams. • Positive change management practices are promoted through existing channels (e.g. Secretary's messaging/DVA newsletter)
INNOVATION	**Establish an innovation fund to support the implementation of new ideas and improvements**	• The number of ideas that have been offered/generated (quarterly). • The number of staff who have been recognised for their ideas. • The number of ideas that have been tried/turned into a project (funded or not). • Improvements to the DVA staff Census scores for innovation relating to: staff recognition; inspiring our people to come up with new or better ways of doing things; and that the Department recognises and supports the notion that failure is a part of innovation.