



Minutes

Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting acknowledging country, veterans and 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 Minutes & actions of previous meeting

Members **NOTED** the 4 August 2023 meeting Minutes were endorsed out of session on 28 August 2023.

Members **AGREED** to close action items 2023OWP/A9, A12, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A18, A19, A20 and A24 and **NOTED** that the action items 2023OWP/A8, A10, A11, A22, A23 and A25 remain to progress. Members requested that further information is provided on Action Item 2023OWP/A21 in relation to how clinical need for hearing services is determined.

Agenda Item 2.1 Response to Action Item 2023OWP/A20 – Assessment of ISP

Members **DISCUSSED** the arrangements under which invalidity support pensions are means tested and **NOTED** that Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP) is not included in that assessment. Members **NOTED** that DVA is working on a communications package through the Younger Veterans Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) to clearly articulate how tax is applied to veteran compensation and payments. Members **NOTED** the complex nature and differing individual circumstances around this issue. Members **DISCUSSED** retrospective discharge and the need to ensure messaging is clear and concise.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A26	Report back to OWP in 2024 on the work of the YVF working group to develop a communications package on how tax is applied to veteran compensation and payments.	Policy & Research

Agenda Item 2.2 Response to Action Item 2023OWP/A24 – Forms for authority to act

Members **NOTED** the departmental response provided.

Agenda Item 3 Modernisation Program Update

Members **DISCUSSED** the 15th October 2023 release of claims improvements in MyService, how veterans are notified through myGov when further information is required for a claim and the ability to upload this information digitally through MyService. Members **NOTED** that additional messaging has been included throughout the online claim form. Further enhancements under the Modernisation Program are scheduled for release by June 2024, including a link to the advocate register to encourage clients to engage an advocate to assist with their claim. Members **NOTED** the importance of notifying DVA of any issues when dealing with the systems so they can be resolved in a timely matter.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A27	Modernisation Program Update to be included on agenda for the first meeting in 2024, noting members to be engaged out of session on a regular basis to ensure enhancements are fit for purpose. Information on change management is to be included in the update.	Chief Information Officer

2023OWP/A28	Further information to be provided on the investigation on determination letters processing in MyService and the election of a lump sum payment or pension when a veteran has passed.	Client Benefits
--------------------	---	-----------------

Agenda Item 4 Advocacy Update

Members **NOTED** the work of the ESORT Advocacy Working Group and **DISCUSSED** the range of issues being investigated. The need for overarching governance of the sector was raised, as well as the balance between wellbeing and competency of advocates. DVA **ADVISED** its intentions to: support Ex-Service Organisations in particular circumstances with advocacy; and play a more active role in assisting veterans to lodge claims.

Members **NOTED** the recommendation of the Working Group to develop the Claims Lodgement Assistants role to support the initial work for claims lodgement.

Members **DISCUSSED** the plan for DVA to deliver Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) Level 4 training in 2024 and **NOTED** the effort required to engage younger veterans as advocates. Members **NOTED** the cost of living pressures and the impact on the engagement and retention of volunteer advocates.

Agenda Item 5 Veterans’ and Families’ Hubs Program Update

Members **NOTED** the existing Hubs and **DISCUSSED** the work to establish new sites. Members **NOTED** that DVA is currently considering business cases and highlighted the importance of financial sustainability to run the Hub as an operation into the next decade.

Agenda Item 6.1 Royal Commission Update

Members **NOTED** DVA’s progress on the Royal Commission interim report recommendations and the significant work within the department to complete over 250 Notices. Members **NOTED** the recommendation to provide advice on ongoing funding needs of the Department, which continues to be discussed with Government.

Agenda Item 6.2 Legislative Reform Update

Members **NOTED** that work is progressing well and **NOTED** that an exposure draft will be circulated for consultation in due course. Members **NOTED** that the proposal put forward included feedback received through the early 2023 consultation sessions.

Agenda Item 6.3 Member Submission – Grandfathering of VEA

Members **NOTED** the update and recognised the concerns about the continuation of services if legislative reform occurs. Members **NOTED** that there are currently no plans to alter offsetting arrangements and **DISCUSSED** greater communication to Totally and Permanently Impaired (TPI) and Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) veterans that they would continue to receive benefits.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2023OWP/A29	Investigation into providing information on the DVA website, around Legislative Reform, to assure Totally and Permanently Impaired (TPI) and Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) veterans that they would continue to receive benefits.	Royal Commission Implementation
2023OWP/A30	Advice to be provided to members on: the automatic deeming of a partner if a veteran has passed away; and policy changes to have the process broken into two parts.	Royal Commission Implementation

Agenda Item 7 Member Submission – MRCA (2) Nomenclature on Gold Cards

Members **NOTED** the departmental response.

Agenda Item 8 Claims Processing Update

Members **NOTED** the update that DVA is on track to eliminate the Initial Liability (IL) backlog by December 2023, and work is underway to ensure the Permanent Impairment (PI) backlog is eliminated by March 2024. Members **NOTED** that the backlog has reduced by 5,000 over the last month and **DISCUSSED** the increase in new claims lodgements. Members **NOTED** the streamlining of medical impairment forms and **DISCUSSED** the positive impact that Claims Support Officers have had on claims processing.

Agenda Item 9 Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP)

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and future automation plan to ensure a timely offer of SRDP to an eligible veteran.

Agenda Item 10 Member Submission – Passage of Information

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and that DVA would discuss further with the Royal Australian Regiment Association out of session. Members **DISCUSSED** the complex nature of the nominated representative form and the constraints when a client chooses to receive information directly.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2023OWP/A31	Out of session discussion to occur between DVA and Royal Australian Regiment Association representative on nominated representatives and how the process can be improved, including what DVA should do when a representative is unavailable. Report back to OWP in 2024 on progress.	Policy & Research

Agenda Item 11 Other Business

Members **DISCUSSED** the need to ensure the forum is being utilised to its potential and how we engage to ensure its intended purpose.

Meeting closed at 2:40pm.

MEMBERS/ATTENDEES	
Mr Andrew Kefford PSM	Chair, Deputy Secretary, Policy & Programs, DVA
Ms Natasha Cole (Deputy Chair)	First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division, DVA
Ms Vanessa Cheng	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 Emily Cook	Australian War Widows Inc. (Proxy)
Mr John King	Returned & Services League of Australia
Mr Clem Russell OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Association
Ms Rona Lunney	Partners of Veterans Association
Mr Rod Hutchings	Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association
Mr Robert Connor	Legacy Australia Inc.
Presenters	
Mr Adam Weiderman	Assistant Secretary, Benefits Policy Branch (Item 2.1)
Ms Laura Sham	Chief Information Officer (Item 3)
Ms Veronica Hancock	First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research Division (Item 4)
Mr Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	Assistant Secretary, Hubs Branch (Item 5)
Mr Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform Branch (Item 6 & 7)
Mr Alexander Caroly	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Claims Processing Improvement Division (Item 8)
Observers	
Mr Michael Harper	Assistant Secretary, VEA & Compensation Support (Item 4)
Ms Peta Mckinnon	Director, Processing Branch, Client Benefits (Item 9)
Ms Morgan S	A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Yangxue S	Secretariat Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations
Apologies	
Ms Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc.
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Mr Ray Kemp OAM JP	Naval Association of Australia
Mr Bill Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia