

2024 National Consultation Framework Review

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the National Consultation Framework (NCF)?

The National Consultation Framework (NCF) is a comprehensive structure that facilitates communication between the veteran community, Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Commissions. [National Consultation Framework | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://dva.gov.au/national-consultation-framework) DVA supports the wellbeing of those who serve or have served in the defence of our nation, and their families. DVA partners with organisations and individuals to help design, implement and deliver effective programs and benefits to enhance the wellbeing of veterans and their families; provides and maintains war graves; and delivers meaningful commemorative activities to promote community recognition and understanding of service and the sacrifices of veterans.

The Repatriation Commission is responsible under *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) for granting pensions, allowances and other benefits, providing treatment and other services and generally administering the VEA. The Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC) oversees the administration of benefits and arrangements under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA). The Commission also decides and manages claims relating to defence service under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA).

Why is the NCF being reviewed?

Since its launch in 2009, NCF has been reviewed every three years to ensure its relevancy and effectiveness to contemporary and evolving needs of the veteran community.

The most recent review was undertaken in 2019 through an online survey.

What is the difference between a “veteran” and “veteran community” and what does “veteran support organisation” mean?

Veterans are serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members. This also includes part-time members and reservists.

Veteran community consists of veterans, families of veterans and organisations that support them.

Veteran support organisations (VSOs) are entities (for-profit and not-for-profit) that provide service and support to veterans and families and includes ex-service organisations (ESOs).

The system seems to be working OK, so why change it?

There will continue to be changes in society, technology and in the military and humanitarian environment in coming years, including the changing nature of service. The support DVA provides to veteran community needs to be reviewed to align with these changes and ensure veteran needs are met. Changes driven by other factors, like improved health treatments, technological improvements or changing needs of emerging, contemporary and ageing veterans will continue to put pressure on DVA to evolve its operations. Providing veteran-centric support and having systems in place to adapt to changing needs of the community requires collaboration so that it is effectively informed “by veterans for veterans”.

The NCF plays a vital role in setting up a model that is agreeable to the Australian Government, DVA and its portfolio agencies and the veteran community.

This Framework needs to remain relevant and therefore must be reviewed every three years to ensure effectiveness, the last review was undertaken in 2019. Since this time recommendations have been made in the Productivity Commission's report *A Better Way to support Veterans*, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and the DVA legislative pathways reform. This review will consider the recommendations from these reports and will examine the effectiveness and relevance of the current NCF within the veteran community, its alignment with veteran wellbeing and the government environment.

The review will consider:

- the structure of NCF including alternative forum structures and roles
- ability to ensure NCF is inclusive, to provide diverse views on issues
- ability of NCF to appropriately represent the current and emerging needs of veterans, families and the ex-service community
- innovative ways to consult with veterans, families and the ex-service community
- comparing and contrasting with other national forums

It is intended that any NCF is still agile and robust to stand for the needs of the veteran community during its tenure and adapt where considered necessary. Where considered necessary, it could be recalibrated to suit contemporary veteran community needs and adapt to emerging needs.

Will this disadvantage ex-service organisations (ESOs) or decommission the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT)?

DVA has a strong collaborative relationship with ESOs throughout the country, especially organisations currently represented on NCF.

Feedback from DVA clients and the broader VSO community suggests that the current NCF could be improved to maximise consultation. This is to ensure that NCF is representative of the contemporary Australian veteran community.

Any future NCF will still include ESOs. The ESOs represented in NCF, how DVA consults with them, and how they, in turn, consult with their respective veteran community members, are all aspects that may potentially change.

How will the NCF review benefit veterans and their families?

The review will examine effectiveness and relevance of the current NCF within the veteran community, its alignment with veteran wellbeing and the government environment. Based on evidence, the review may recommend changes to the NCF to better meet the needs of veterans and families now and into the future.

It is intended that any NCF is still agile and robust to stand for the needs of the veteran community during its tenure and adapt where considered necessary.

Is this about cost cutting or stripping veteran entitlements?

The NCF review is not about cutting costs or removing entitlements – veteran compensation deliberations do not fall within the NCF remit.

It is only a framework for consulting with the veteran community.

What is DVA trying to achieve with the NCF review?

The review aims to align NCF with ADF workforce strategies so that it is representational of veterans and families. It is so that the wider veteran community is included and heard by DVA through

effective communication mechanisms. This involves inclusion of veteran groups such as First Nations, LGBTI+, culturally and linguistically diverse veterans, and those living in rural or remote areas and/or overseas, etc.

Will DVA be consulting with veterans and their families on the NCF?

DVA wants to hear from Australian veterans and families. This includes veterans and families of all ages, those living in rural and regional areas or outside of Australia, First Nations people, veterans and families from diverse backgrounds, family members of Victoria Cross recipients, children and grandchildren of Vietnam veterans, and reservists, etc.

This broad view will help DVA ensure that NCF is representational of the current Australian veteran population and is the building block to capture the emerging needs of veterans and their families.

What sorts of things will the review cover?

The review explores:

- background of respondents that can be aggregated against views on effectiveness and relevancy
- awareness of NCF that set the background to responses in relation to key measures being evaluated
- relevancy of the current NCF. It assesses the alignment of NCF with needs and priorities of veterans and families, as well as within the broader context in which it works. A relevant NCF would address the most pressing needs and challenges of veterans and families and is designed and implemented in a way that is appropriate to the local context. Achieving relevance requires a deep understanding of the needs and priorities of Australian veterans and their families, as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political context in which NCF operates
- effectiveness, assessing the extent to which the current NCF is achieving its intended aims or goals and whether it is meeting the contemporary needs of veterans and their families.

Views on the above measures will inform the future NCF, decision-making and resource allocation and provide an assurance that desired outcomes are being achieved.

Further, the review is seeking views on the draft Terms of Reference for a Veterans Ministerial Advisory Council (VetMAC).

What is the Veterans Ministerial Advisory Council (VetMAC)?

The Council will be an independent body reporting directly to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel. It will consult (and act) on advice from other stakeholders beyond the veteran community.

The scope for the Council covers the lifetime wellbeing of the veteran.

Will the Veterans Ministerial Advisory Council replace ESORT?

VetMAC will be a separate body reporting directly to the Minister. The NCF Review will consider the interaction between NCF Forums and other consultative mechanisms.

How can I become involved? Can I provide input?

You can become involved by:

- completing the online survey
- encouraging others to take part

- providing thoughts and feedback to your ESO executive.

Can I provide input face-to-face?

DVA wishes to ensure that all interested parties can provide input independently and that no stakeholder is disadvantaged or prevented from taking part.

An online DVA Community Consultation Town Hall is being held on 19 August 2024.

Unfortunately, it would be extremely difficult to travel to all interested parties in regional and remote areas and conduct effective consultation workshops. Conducting workshops in cities would be unfair to those in rural or remote areas. Virtual workshops may not suit all interested parties. Consequently, the review will be conducted through an online survey.

How long will this review take?

The review is scheduled to be completed by December 2024, with options to be provided to the Minister in early 2025.

It is expected that any changes to NCF would be fully implemented by late 2025.

How will the NCF review work?

To ensure broader awareness of the review, consultation will consist of a structured online survey with opportunity to provide input outside the context of the survey.

Information on NCF review, including Frequently Asked Questions, Terms of Reference and status updates will be made available online regularly. [National Consultation Framework Review | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](#)

The NCF review will be promoted via social media, print media and in face-to-face forums, to ensure as many interested parties as possible in regional and metropolitan areas are aware of and able to access the survey.

Who will conduct the NCF review?

A steering committee is overseeing the review and includes:

- Repatriation Commissioner of the Repatriation Commission (Chair)
- Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission
- Deputy Secretary, Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience Group of DVA
- Head of Military Personnel, Department of Defence
- Independent Member who is a veteran with defence industry experience.

Why is DVA also consulting on setting up a national peak ESO body?

DVA is collaborating with the veteran community to develop options for a ESO Peak Body that meets the needs of veterans, families, ESOs and other organisations that provide veterans and their families with advocacy support. This was recommended by the Productivity Commission.

An independent ESO Peak Body has the potential to become a unified and representative voice to strengthen advocacy across the sector on issues affecting veterans and their families. By fostering consensus and collaboration, it would help to streamline the consultation processes, reducing duplication of efforts.

Is the NCF review consultation related to ESO Peak Body consultation?

DVA has engaged Nous Group to independently conduct consultations, including through a survey that seeks feedback from a range of stakeholders to understand how veterans and families interact with organisations that provide veteran and family advocacy support.

An ESO Peak Body Options Paper will present options, including work already undertaken by the sector, and insights and feedback from stakeholders for a model.

Rather than looking for a single solution, Peak Body consultations will consider proposals that have already been put forward while further exploring options for a future ESO Peak Body.

Regardless of the option considered by DVA and the Minister on a national peak body, ESOs will remain an integral part of NCF.

Are the consultations anything to do with the Productivity Commission?

While the Productivity Commission report, *A Better Way to Support Veterans*, includes recommendations focussing on reviewing the way DVA deals with ex-service organisations, NCF review would have been conducted even without these findings.

However, the Productivity Commission recommended that the Australian Government set up an advisory council to the Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans, to provide advice on the lifetime wellbeing of veterans and the best-practice design, administration and stewardship of services provided to current and ex-serving members and their families. The advisory council should consist of part-time members with diverse capabilities, including individuals with experience in military or veterans' affairs, health care, rehabilitation, aged care, social services and other compensation schemes.

In addition to the proposed Veterans Ministerial Advisory Council, the Productivity Commission also recommended that the Australian Government should consider:

- a funding contribution for a national peak body of veterans' organisations, which could provide advice on veterans' policy issues
- the establishment of appropriate reference groups to advise on mental health, rehabilitation, transition, supports for families and lifelong wellbeing issues, including in relation to the varying needs of veterans of different ages and circumstances
- reviewing the role or necessity for the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) considering alternative, more targeted, approaches.

Are the consultations anything to do with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide?

While the Royal Commission did not make any recommendations relating to NCF in its interim report, any recommendations made in the final report will be considered as part of the current NCF review.

Of note, the *Preliminary Interim Report of the Interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention 2021* recommended that the Australian Government should create an independent entity to identify ex-service organisation and veteran support organisation groups, build capacity, deconflict services, focus funding, integrate services across the community and all levels of government, and provide dynamic communication channels. The interim report recommended that entities should ensure that ADF members, veterans and their families have an awareness of the services and supports available to them.

Are the ESO Peak Body and NCF review consultations the same as the Royal Commission Implementation body?

No.

The ESO Peak Body (if set up) and NCF are mechanisms by which DVA and the Commissions connect with most veterans and families through organisations that stand for them. These mechanisms are used to communicate with veterans and families on policy and compensation matters.

The Royal Commission Implementation body, if recommended and accepted by the Australian Government, would be a time limited Commonwealth entity to oversee the implementation of recommendations made in the final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This entity would report directly to the government via their relevant portfolio Minister on progress of implementing the recommendations by the relevant departments of the Commonwealth.