



## Minutes

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

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming attendees, noting membership changes and representation arrangements for the meeting, as well as apologies received. Details are listed at **Annexure A**. No conflicts of interest were declared.

The Ode was recited, and members acknowledged the service and sacrifice of all veterans and families.

NOTE: The Chair, Repatriation Commissioner and MAJGEN Melick departed the meeting at 3:30pm and Mr Kefford assumed chairmanship of the meeting at that point.

### Agenda Item 2 Action Items

Members **NOTED** the 14 May 2024 ESORT Minutes were endorsed out of session on 4 June 2024.

Members **AGREED** to close Action Items 2023ESORT/A28, A39, 2024ESORT/A09, A10, A13 and A15.

Members **NOTED** E2020/27, 2022 ESORT/A36, 2023ESORT/A47, 2024ESORT/A02 A07, A11, A12, A14 and A16 remain in progress.

Members **NOTED** progress on recommendations relating to release of client information (2024ESORT/A14) will be provided out of session.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A17	Related to 2024ESORT/A14. Information regarding recommendations from work underway to address privacy concerns surrounding the provision of family member's personal information to ESOs on the death of a veteran to be circulated to members out of session.	Client Benefits

### Agenda Item 3 Secretary's Update

Members received an update on from the Chair on DVA priorities. Members **NOTED** the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is due to deliver its final report and recommendations to the Government on 9 September 2024. Members **AGREED** to meet shortly after the release of the Royal Commission's report to review the recommendations. Members also **NOTED** DVA would enquire of the Commission if hard copies of the report could be provided to members.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of encouraging veteran employment both from Ex-Service Organisations (ESO) and DVA. Members **NOTED** the significance of ensuring a positive view of what services and supports are provided from DVA and **REQUESTED** DVA provide facts and figures on this that could be used in ESO publications and communications.

Members **DISCUSSED** the requirement for a Specialist referral for MRI, highlighting the need for a broader discussion around treatment principles at the next ESORT meeting.

The Chair referenced recent information provided to Members regarding the implementation of an invoicing portal for use by providers when seeking payment from DVA and asked Members to encourage providers to use the portal to submit invoices. Members **NOTED** DVA's focus to ensure invoices are processed more quickly. Members **NOTED** the Portal can be used by clients as well as providers and requested publication of additional educational materials to facilitate that.

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The Chair **ADVISED** members Chantelle Stratford will commence in DVA next week and will lead the development of a Women’s Veterans Strategy. This approach was guided by feedback from the Women’s Veteran Policy Forum held in May.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to</b>
<b>2024ESORT/A18</b>	Facts, figures, statistics and talking points to be circulated to ESORT members regarding veteran employment and range of services provided.	VSFE
<b>2024ESORT/A19</b>	Update to be provided at the December 2024 ESORT meeting on treatment principles, with reference to requirements for Specialist referral for certain procedures.	Policy and Programs
<b>2024ESORT/A20</b>	Update communications to include how individual veterans can access and use the invoicing portal.	Ministerial, Engagement and Communication

## ESORT MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

- Agenda Item 4.1      Grants in Aid (Royal Australian regiment Corporation Ltd)**  
**Agenda Item 4.2      Grants in Aid (The Australian Special Air Service Association)**

Members **DISCUSSED** Grants in Aid Funding and a request from ESORT members to provide recommendation to Government to increase funding. Members **AGREED** the grants guidelines would be updated and circulated to ESORT members for endorsement, prior to DVA providing advice to Government, noting the amount of funding was a matter for Government. .

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to</b>
<b>2024ESORT/A21</b>	DVA to provide advice on the time to process Grants in Aid funding, in addition to the potential to accelerate 2024 timeframes and review scheduling for 2025.	Grants and Hubs
<b>2024ESORT/A22</b>	Circulate revised Grant Opportunity Guidelines (GoGs) to ESORT members for feedback, to ensure GoGs have the breadth required to ensure effective use of grant monies. DVA to seek Government consideration of updated GoGs.	Grants and Hubs

- Agenda Item 5      Suitability of MRCA 2004 for the Prompt Determination of Claims in the Event of Hostilities or War (Vietnams Veterans’ Association of Australia Inc.)**

Members **NOTED** the member submission and discussed the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA) suitability to allow prompt processing of claims in the event of casualties from hostilities or war. Members **NOTED** the introduction of the Veterans’ Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 (VETS Bill) will remove unnecessary complexity. The Chair advised that the MRCA 2004 was suitable legislation for use in hostilities or war.

- Agenda Item 6      Update to the Boys’ Case – Systemic and Governance Issues (Defence Force Welfare Association)**

Members **NOTED** the member submission and were advised DVA has conducted a review of a random sample of spondylosis cases. Members **NOTED** the review found there to be no systemic issues with the application of the onset policy for spondylosis. Members noted DVA will continue to provide training and guidance to claims assessors and delegates on how to correctly apply the onset policy in relation to this condition.

**Agenda Item 7.1 DVA Medical Transport (TPI Federation of Australia)**

**Agenda Item 7.2 DVA Medical Transport After Hours Provisions (TPI Federation of Australia)**

Members **NOTED** the member submission and DVA **CONFIRMED** Veteran Gold or White Card holders with eligibility under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) can access the Booked Car with Driver (BCWD) service, where DVA arranges taxi or hire car travel for clients to attend approved treatment with no out of pocket expenses, regardless of age. Members were encouraged to provide specific examples where this service is not being approved so that further guidance and materials can be provided.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A23	Booked Car with Driver (BCWD) infographic to be reviewed to ensure adequate information provided on veterans aged less than 79 years and over accessing the program.	Program Delivery

**Agenda Item 8 Veterans Children Identifier on School, Education Enrolment Forms in all States and Territories of Australia (The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc)**

Members **NOTED** the member submission and **NOTED** this was discussed at the most recent meeting of the Commonwealth State and Territory Committee (CSTC) and is on the agenda for the next meeting of the Veterans' Ministers Council. Members were encouraged to lobby state and territory governments to include veteran identifiers on a range of administrative forms such as school enrolment forms and **NOTED** progress in expanding the availability of veteran identifiers may feature in imminent Royal Commission recommendations.

**UPDATES TO DVA INIATIVES**

**Agenda Item 9.1 Hearing Services Update**

Members **NOTED** the update on veteran hearing services and **NOTED** the Veteran Hearing Services Framework will support greater transparency and accountability. Members **NOTED** DVA has implemented new internal guidance documents to support a wellbeing approach, as well as updating forms to simplify processes for veterans. The Audiology Prior Financial Approval Authorisation Request form (D9398) has been updated and shared with service providers for their initial feedback, and DVA **AGREED** this form could be circulated to Ex-Service Organisations for their feedback also.

**Agenda Item 9.2 Legislative Reform Update**

Members were updated on the progress of legislative reform and **NOTED** the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 (VETS Bill) has now been referred to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry with a report due by 3 October 2024.

**Agenda Item 9.3 Advocacy Update**

Members received an update on the Advocacy Governance Working Group (WG) and **NOTED** the Working Group has settled key elements for the form and role of a proposed independent advocacy professional body, which the Working Group has proposed should be called The Institute of Veterans' Advocates.

Members **NOTED** a consultation paper has been publicly released for comment by 4 October 2024, and **NOTED** a further update will be provided at the next meeting.

**Agenda Item 9.4 Claims Processing Update**

The Chair **ACKNOWLEDGED** the pending departure from DVA of First Assistant Secretary Natasha Cole and her leadership in addressing the claims processing backlog.

Members **NOTED** the claims allocation backlog was cleared at the end of February 2024 and DVA is now managing 'business as usual' levels of claims across all three major claim types.

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Members **NOTED** DVA will now be a member of Department of Defence Work Health and Safety (WHS) Committee which will provide another forum to share claim patterns between Defence and DVA.

### Agenda Item 9.5 Aged Care Update

Members **NOTED** the update from the Aged and Community Care Taskforce and the continued consultation with external partnerships. Members **DISCUSSED** legislative reform in the Aged Care Portfolio and DVA **NOTED** veteran in home care will continue to be provided by DVA. Members **NOTED** an updated information kits for veterans and their families to enter residential aged care is being developed, as well as kits for providers to ensure continuity of DVA entitlements and supports.

### Agenda Item 9.6 Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner Update

The Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner (Commissioner) provided an update to members on work completed over the last four years and **NOTED** the Commissioner would finish her term on 5 August 2025. Members **NOTED** the Commissioner's focus on removing barriers in the system for families and the need to determine the gaps between DVA and Ex-Service Organisation service offerings. Members also **NOTED** the development of a Joint Defence and Veteran Family Strategy.

### Agenda Item 10 Claims decision making – management of cases on hand

Members were provided an update on proposed enhancements to transparency of reporting on claims processing. Members **NOTED** the desire to add further level of detail to public reporting of claims. Members were **ENCOURAGED** to provide feedback on other areas that might be helpful to report on.

### Agenda Item 11 Veteran and Family Learning and Innovation Network of Knowledge

Members **NOTED** the approach to market for the 'Establishment and operation of a Veteran and Family – Learning and Innovation Network of Knowledge (VF-LINK)', which opened on 29 June 2024 and will close on 20 September 2024.

### Agenda Item 12 National Consultation Framework Review

Members **NOTED** DVA hosted a community town hall meeting on 19 August 2024 focused on the National Consultation Framework Review. Members **NOTED** a survey has been released on DVA website to enable veterans, families and ESOs to participate in the review and members were encouraged to participate in providing feedback.

### Agenda Item 13 ESORT Communique

Members were provided an opportunity to contribute to and endorse the ESORT Communique to be distributed following the meeting.

### Agenda Item 14 Other Business

Members received a brief update from the Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) representative and **AGREED** to receive a comprehensive report on the work at hand at the December 2024 meeting.

Members **REQUESTED** DVA consider raising the issue of Veteran Liaison Officers (VLOs) in public hospitals with Commonwealth and state counterparts.

Members **REQUESTED** DVA consider raising the requirement for veterans to pay additional daily contributions for stays beyond 35 days in hospital with Commonwealth and state counterparts.

Members **DISCUSSED** the sustainability of Veterans' and Families' Hubs operations and **REQUESTED** an update at the December 2024 meeting.

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<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to</b>
<b>2024ESORT/A24</b>	Update to be provided at the December 2024 ESORT meeting on the work underway at the Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) and sustainability of Veterans’ and Families’ Hubs operations.	Secretariat
<b>2024ESORT/A25</b>	Veteran Liaison Officers (VLOs) in public hospitals to be raised with Commonwealth and state counterparts.	Policy and Programs
<b>2024ESORT/A26</b>	The requirement for veterans to pay additional daily contributions for stays beyond 35 days in hospital to be raised with Commonwealth and state counterparts	Policy and Programs

**Meeting closed: 4:40pm**

**Annexure A**

<b>ESORT Members</b>	
Ms Alison Frame	Chair, President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC)
Mr Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	A/g Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Mr Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Ms Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Mr Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	A/g Deputy President, MRCC Member
DGJTA AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooji	MRCC Member, Department of Defence ( <b>proxy</b> )
The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith	Australian Special Air Service Association
Mr William (Bill) Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia
BRIG Michael Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Ms Pat McCabe OAM	TPI Federation Australia
Ms Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Ms Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Mr David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Ms Amy Cooper	Soldier On
Ms Deanna Nott	Air Force Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
Mr Mike von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
LT COL Chris Moss	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD SC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Mr Chris Lewis	Defence Force Welfare Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
<b>Other Attendees</b>	
Mr Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary Policy & Programs
Ms Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience
Mr James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
<b>Presenters</b>	
Mr Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Policy (Item 5 and 9.2)
Mr Adam Weiderman	Assistant Secretary, Policy (Item 6)
Ms Moira Campbell	Assistant Secretary, Client Programs (Item 7)
Ms Cath Haffner	Assistant Secretary, Policy (Item 9.3)

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Ms Veronica Hancock	First Assistant Secretary, Research, Evaluation & Data (Item 11)
Ms Nadine Clode	Assistant Secretary, Research (Item 11)
<b>Observers</b>	
Ms Paula Goodwin	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, Engagement & Communications
<b>Apologies</b>	
Ms Charlotte Webb	Defence Families Australia
Mr (Legatee) Wayne McNee	Legacy Australia Inc
Ms Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
MAJGEN Wade Stothart DSC AM CSC	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
RADM Sonya Bennett	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Mr Greg Vines	MRCC Member, Comcare
Mr Ian Lindgren	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Mr Joe Iervasi	Air Force Association
<b>Secretariat</b>	
Ms Morgan S	A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Jessica L	Secretariat Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations