

03/04/2024

My name is Kevin [REDACTED] Department of Veterans Affairs
(DVA) File Number [REDACTED]

I am now retired from a 25 year career in the Royal
Australian Navy.

I retired a Chief Petty Officer Marine Technician.

I was involved in the following Operations

Operation Catalyst

09 / 01 / 2005 - 08 / 06 / 2005

Operation Resolute

19 / 07 / 2006 - 20 / 07 / 2006

Operation Slipper

23 / 06 / 2002 - 08 / 11 / 2002

Operation Trek

29 / 07 / 2001 - 25 / 08 / 2001

East Timor: 19 June 1999

Iraq: 18 March 2003

Solomon Islands: 8 June 2000

I joined the Navy in 1984 as an apprentice and this training
was conducted at [REDACTED].

This apprenticeship lasted 2 1/2 years and consisted of
trade training and Naval related training.

At no stage was any training offered on how to use DVA or what it was for.

One of the times that I was posted to [REDACTED] Sydney I conducted a Veteran Affairs Facilitator Course.

After the course I was available to help my immediate boss and even the Commanding Office of [REDACTED] SYDNEY.

I continued this trend for all future postings to ships and shore establishments and was astounded that there was such a lack of knowledge accessing DVA.

I discharge from the Navy [REDACTED] and joined the RSLWA.

My RSLWA Advocate was [REDACTED] who I had for 9 months.

He had retired from Anzac House but I was not informed. There was no information or record of me on any case list

I have recently been accepted by DVA for a review of my accepted conditions that had become worse.

I phoned the Veteran Affairs Department WA Office at the AMP building, 140 St Georges Terrace in Perth and talked to a lovely receptionists called [REDACTED]

I asked her that I was looking for, an advocate to help me lodge some new claims and to have approved ones reassessed.

I made a appointment with my partner and we caught the bus into Perth city and arrived at the AMP building.

We tried to get to level 4 as instructed but had to catch the lift to level 5 and walk down the fire stairs to access level 4. We had arrived 10 minutes before Office hours and stood outside waiting.

A man exited the lift and asked us if we were waiting for DVA to open to which we replied yes.

He informed us that reception was on the 5th floor and scanned his ID to call a lift for us.

When the DVA door opened I talked to a different receptionists and told her that I had an appointment. She asked me what the appointment was for and I told her about the phone call I had with [REDACTED] and that she had booked me in for todays visit.

After telling her the reason for the appointment I was told that they don't provide the service that I require and that I needed to engage the services of an advocate.

She contacted Anzac House and told us to go straight there as an advocate was willing to squeeze us in.

After a quick bus trip we arrived at Anzac House and sat down with a RSLWA Advocate.

It was explained that I would have to contact RSLWA and register my details and then I would be placed on a waiting list as all the Advocates lists were FULL.

The Advocate look up my Veteran Affairs(VA) File Number and informed me that I was covered under all four VA Act's

[MRCA, DRCA, VEA and one other that I am trying to identify]

I was given a list of Facilitators and I contact each of them via phone and email when I got home.

I am still waiting for them to get back to me.

I was very pleased that the Advocate had made time to see me and after the hour long meeting I was emailed the following information.

Hi Kevin,

Thank you for coming in to RSLWA today.

As discussed, you will need to:

- claim for reassessment of your current accepted conditions on [see below for instructions]
- claim for hearing loss and tinnitus – I will send you a separate email with instructions
- request your medical and service records – instructions below
- research your medical/service records to identify any injuries/conditions incurred whilst serving
- have your GP complete a separate Diagnosis Form for every current condition that you believe you can

attribute to your military service

- have your GP refer you to a psychiatrist if you believe you have any mental health conditions [see attached list]
- complete RSLWA's onboarding form to seek the assistance of an Advocate.

Worsening of accepted conditions

1. DRCA Worsening Claims process

To request a reassessment of DRCA accepted conditions, send an email to COMPENSATION.CLAIMS@dva.gov.au with the following in the text:

- Veteran Name
- Veteran File Number
- DOB
- I request a reassessment of my DRCA accepted condition XXXXXX [

2. MRCA Worsening Process. To request a reassessment of DRCA accepted conditions, send an email to COMPENSATION.CLAIMS@dva.gov.au with the following in the text:

- Veteran Name
- Veteran File Number
- DOB

- I request a reassessment of my DRCA accepted condition XXXXXX

Request Service Records

Request your medical and service records either:

- online at www.defence.gov.au/about/accessing-information/personal-information-requests. In the **Request details/Purpose of request** – choose **Other**. Select all the following options:
- Personnel records
- Certificate of Service
- Service Report
- Medical records
- Psychological records
- Other – free type *Sentinel Reports*.

You will need certified two x certified proof of ID; and a hand-signed signature verification document of the applicant with the wording "This signature supports my online application for Defence information on [insert date]." followed by a signature.

Request RSLWA Advocate

To request the assistance of an RSLWA Advocate to submit claims, you will need to complete the Advocacy Claim Pack at: [RSLWA Advocacy Onboarding Package \(snapforms.com.au\)](https://snapforms.com.au).

Lodging a Successful Claim

There are basically two types of initial claims:

- injuries/conditions that occurred whilst you were serving, and
- conditions that have resulted from your service or your injuries from your service. For example, you injured your knee whilst serving, and now you have ongoing issues with your knee.

For a successful claim application, you will need:

- diagnosis from an appropriate treating practitioner (including any reports they used to form a diagnosis) - refer to page 2 of the Diagnosis Form - – not normally required if claiming an injury that occurred whilst serving
- supporting documentation from your medical and service records ie medical attendances, incident

reports, approvals for civilian sport participation.

- statement of contention addressing how your Defence service caused/contributed to your condition [refer to the Statement of Principles to address at least one factor]. Statement to include: When it happened, Why it happened, What happened during and after, Where it happened, How it happened, No abbreviations, or slang.

Feel free to contact us if you have any queries or require further assistance in submitting claims.

I followed the steps in the above email and managed to do most of what I needed to achieve online using the DVA Portal, attached to my MyGov account.

I had to refer back to the Advocate multiple times to get advice and each time they were very helpful.

My local Police station was very helpful in obtaining two x certified proof of ID; and a hand-signed signature verification document.

I am still waiting for RSLWA to get back to me about finding an Advocate.

I have also contacted many RSL sub branches and am still waiting for a reply.

My next step is to visit these sub branches and try to meet each Advocate and introduce myself.

I contacted Australian Veteran Advocacy (AVA)

Hello Kevin

Australian Veteran Advocacy (AVA) will assist you with all matters related to submitting/managing claims and accessing benefits through DVA if you choose to engage us as your advocate.

However, we also want to ensure your holistic health needs are being met. The medical team at **Australian Veteran Health Services (AVHS)** are the only business we know of in Australia that offer via in-person assessment (currently limited to Brisbane and Canberra locations only) a complete overall health assessment for veterans. If you are not in the permanent forces or on CFTS / SERVOP C arrangements, this assessment may be of benefit to you.

Development of a tailored Action Plan is a complex undertaking that requires a deep understanding of your health and service circumstances. In order to ensure the Action Plan developed for you is fit for purpose, completion and return of the attached Client information form is required.

Australian Veteran Advocacy have introduced the charge of a \$250 fee for provision of your tailored Action Plan. To progress further, please pay the attached invoice and return the attached Client Information form making note of your invoice reference number. Can you also provide (if possible):

- Details of any claims you have submitted to DVA that are still in progress, including:
- the claim submission documents (any attachments you uploaded with the claims)
- a pdf copy of the claim submission, which you can access from MyService by clicking 'view' next to each claim.

After reading the email from AVA it sounded as if they would meet all me Advocate requirements.

I looked into there contract terms and was disturbed at what I found.

Fees:

- a) The Client agrees to pay the following fees to AVA within 30 days of any DVA compensation offer for permanent impairment, disability or similar, received during the period under clause (3), regardless of whether the Client accepts that offer:
 - i) for compensation offered as a lump sum (such as DRCA PI payments), 5% of the lump sum value;
 - ii) for compensation offered as an optional lump sum (such as MRCA PI payments), 5% of the lump sum value;
 - iii) for compensation offered as a compulsory annuity (such as VEA PI payments), 5% of annuity's value calculated over

10 years.

b) Rates under subclause (a) are exclusive of GST.

c) Total fees payable under this agreement are capped at \$7,500, exclusive of GST.

d) Any Action Plan fee or client pre-payment will be set-off against the fees payable under this clause.

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I am retired now and have the time, equipment and support to contact these Advocate organisations and Psychologists. I don't know how veterans who are working or living on the streets would be able to do any of this?

I don't understand why veterans have to seek the assistance of an external advocate in order to navigate the DVA process. Why doesn't DVA provide this service?

Yesterday [REDACTED] I received an email from a advocate from NSW [REDACTED] RSL Sub Branch. She has agreed to take me on as a new client.

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I have noticed some changes in my emotions and mental health condition.

I remembered that the RSL Advocate had informed me that I was covered for mental health conditions services under my White Card.

I spoke to other veterans and RSLWA members and they advised me not to use DVA Mental Health Services - Open

Arms.

They all said the same thing that after contacting Open Arms seeking help they were placed on a 6 month waiting list.

Towards the end of the 6 month period they were contacted and told that there wasn't anyone available to see them and they would be placed back on the waiting list.

I contacted Open Arms [REDACTED] and provided my contact details and was told that someone MAY be in contact with me between 5 to 7 days.

I was contacted at 7pm [REDACTED] but miss the call.

I phoned the next morning and after providing more personal information I was informed that a councillor would be in touch.

I was lucky as a family friend is a Child Psychologist and after some investigation she gave me a list of colleagues that had dealings with DVA clients.

I also contacted the RSL Advocate and my GP and was given some names to follow up.

I contacted everyone on the list and everyone said the same thing:

- We do not accept DVA White Cards.
- You will have to obtain a referral from your GP, email it to us and we will consider taking you on as a new client after someone has reviewed your referral.
- If accepted as a new client you will have to pay after each consultation and then put a Reimbursement claim into DVA.
- We are not taking on any new clients at the moment.

I contacted [REDACTED] Mental Wellbeing Services.
Hi Kevin,

Thanks for your email. Your enquiry was passed on to my team, and I'm therefore hoping to give you some information on [REDACTED] Mental Wellbeing Services (MWS) and explore how we may be able to assist.

For your information, MWS is a short-term bulk-billing counselling service based in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We support mild to moderate mental health concerns; and as we are a bulk-billed service, prioritise supporting persons experiencing disadvantage. We can offer a maximum of ten sessions, typically scheduled fortnightly, under a Mental Health Treatment Plan. This usually equates to about 5 months of support at a maximum. Referrals are via a GP, who will need to complete a Mental Health Treatment Plan as part of that referral.

A few caveats, however. Firstly, we are a short-term service that supports mild to moderate mental health concerns and therefore are often not the best fit for persons who have long-term and/or complex mental health needs. Secondly, as the service is counselling-only, we are unable to provide assessment, reports, diagnoses, medications, or many of the functions that are typically associated with psychiatry or similar services. Thirdly, our service is wholly Medicare-funded, and we are unable to provide services through DVA. If your needs fall into any of the above, it may be wiser to

seek services elsewhere.

As you are a veteran, I am curious if you've engaged with Open Arms. As I understand, they are better resourced for long-term or complex mental health needs versus Medicare-funded services. I would also imagine that they hold more appropriate expertise around veterans' needs. Also, if your needs are trauma-based, I believe that DVA does fully fund some trauma management programs run out of Hollywood Hospital if that is of any assistance to you.

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Having written this submission I have to make mention of the statement written on my White Card.

"For what they have done, this we do. " and the Australian Defence Veterans Covenant,

"We, the people of Australia, respect and give thanks to all who have served in our Defence Force and our families.

We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice demanded of all who commit to defend our nation.

We undertake to preserve the memory and deeds of all who have served and promise to welcome, embrace, and support all military veterans as respected and valued members of our community. "

I have asked myself and other veterans what has been, and is being done for Veterans?

When I hear that Veteran's are taking their lives and are living

on the streets.

I think that we as a 1st world country need to do more.