



## Minutes

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

The Chair opened the meeting acknowledging country, veterans, current serving Australian Defence Force Personnel and welcomed observers. Members **NOTED** apologies as listed at Annexure A and no conflicts of interest were raised.

The Chair welcomed Jessica Sullivan, the new representative for the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association.

### Agenda Item 2 Action items

Members **NOTED** that the minutes from the previous meeting on 16 July 2024 were endorsed out of session and published on the DVA website.

Members **AGREED** to close action items 2023YVF/A04, A14, 2024YVF/A01, A06, A07, A08, A09 and A11.

Members **AGREED** that Action Items 2024YVF/A05, A10 and A12 remain in progress.

### Agenda Item 3 Member Submission – Concern regarding unwanted reassessments by DVA

Members **NOTED** the information provided regarding the processes and considerations for Delegates requesting medical reassessments.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** Tara Cavanagh, has recently commenced as First Assistant Secretary for the Client Benefits Division.

Members **DISCUSSED** procedural questions related to the reassessment process, acknowledging that it may be a cause of distress to some and **DISCUSSED** the need for clearer messaging to alleviate these concerns.

Members **AGREED** that a review of the communication strategies utilised by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) should be undertaken to improve understanding among veterans.

Members **NOTED** that with the introduction of new veterans' legislation there could be an opportunity to consider how DVA supports advocates, such as the creation of a dedicated group or communication channel to support and respond to advocate enquiries and serve as an escalation point for advocates to use to contact a senior delegate when required. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** there was a consensus on the importance of having such a mechanism and **AGREED** to explore this further, requesting that DVA present at a future meeting on potential options.

Members **NOTED** the significance of expressing gratitude for the contributions made by advocates and expressed hope for future improvements in the veteran support system.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
2024YVF/A13 – DVA to present to YVF on potential options for a dedicated group or communication channel to support and respond to advocate enquiries and serve as an escalation point for advocates to use to contact a senior delegate when required.	Client Benefits

#### Agenda Item 4 Member Submission – Defence Health Warning

Members **NOTED** that DVA publishes a range of exposure research materials and guidance on its website and CLIK.

Members **NOTED** the lack of a centralised repository of Defence Health Warnings and materials hazard information, that can be used by advocates to support claims. Members **NOTED** that DVA does publish a range of information on its website and Consolidated Library of Information and Knowledge (CLIK) about exposures and where these may have health effects, based on known exposures and hazards.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the materials sought are managed and produced by Defence and there may be potential security or confidentiality concerns with their release. Members **NOTED** compensation schemes administered by DVA are no-fault schemes and that the lack of historical data on hazardous exposures should not impede the processing of claims. Members **AGREED** that further dialogue with the Department of Defence is essential to facilitate better information sharing and **NOTED** that DVA has secured senior level representation on the Defence Senior Work Health and Safety (WHS) Committee, providing an opportunity to influence the release of this information where possible.

Members **NOTED** ongoing research by DVA into exposure activities and their health implications and **AGREED** that there is a need for improved access to research findings and historical data to assist advocates in lodging claims.

Members **DISCUSSED** the integration of health records between DVA and the Department of Defence and **AGREED** to request an update from the Department of Defence on the status of the JP2060 Phase 4 - Health Knowledge Management System project at the next YVF meeting.

Members **AGREED** to explore options for enhancing the accessibility of historical reports and data related to veteran health, by providing what WHS materials, including exposure data safety sheets, they had sourced to DVA with a view to it being published for the use of all advocates via a mechanism such as a portal on CLIK.

Members requested an update on planned updates and upgrades to CLIK, to be provided at a future meeting.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
<b>2024YVF/A14</b> – Historical material safety information that has been located by YVF members to be provided to DVA to be made available through CLIK.	The Warriors Return and other members
<b>2024YVF/A15</b> - An update to be provided at the next YVF meeting from the Department of Defence on the status of JP2060 Phase 4 Health Knowledge Management System project.	Department of Defence
<b>2024YVF/A16</b> - A presentation at the next YVF meeting on the future of CLIK database, with a focus on its intended functionality and improvements.	Policy & Programs
<b>2024YVF/A17</b> - YVF recommends that DVA establish a portal of defence related WHS warnings that have been issued and that that information is made available via mechanism such as CLIK, and request that this matter be raised at Defence WHS committee	Policy & Programs

#### Agenda Item 5 Advocacy Update

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the summary of discussions on advocacy by the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) provided by ESORT member, Mr Mike von Berg MC OAM.

Members **NOTED** the update on the work of the Ex-service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) Advocacy Working Group and **DISCUSSED** the proposed establishment of the Institute of Veterans' Advocates (the Institute) noting the ongoing work to establish a professional body aimed at improving governance and ethical standards within veterans' advocacy services. Members **NOTED** that one of the main intentions of the Institute is to provide the community with clarity on proficiency and capability of Veterans Advocates and is not to necessarily remove Fee for Service Advocates from the range of options available to DVA clients.

Members **NOTED** Recommendation 99 of the Royal Commission Final Report which called for improvement to, ‘...compensation advocacy by funding professional, paid advocates.’, and the implications of this recommendation on the current advocacy framework. Members **DISCUSSED** the distribution of funding through the BEST grant program, expressing concern at some discrepancies in allocation among various sub-branches and **NOTED** that DVA has been engaged in fraud investigation activities.

Members **NOTED** that while DVA does not classify advocates as providers of legal advice; the potential legal implications of the advice given by advocates requires a level of indemnity insurance.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of actively recruiting advocates to ensure a robust support system for veterans. Members **NOTED** that the current model lacks incentives for individuals to engage in advocacy work, emphasising the need for a comprehensive recruitment campaign.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
<b>2024YVF/A18</b> – Advocacy update to be standing agenda item for future YVF meetings.	Secretariat
<b>2024YVF/A19</b> - Update on DVA Fraud investigations as information becomes available to be included on the forward work plan.	Secretariat

### **Agenda Item 6      Legislative Reform Update**

Members **NOTED** the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (FADT) Legislation Committee tabled its report on the Veterans’ Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 (VETS Bill) on 3 October 2024.

Members **NOTED** the summary of the report provided by Assistant Secretary, Simon Hill.

Members **DISCUSSED** the Committee’s receipt of 32 submissions from various stakeholders, including ex-service organisations and individuals, as well as DVA, all contributing to the legislative considerations. Members **NOTED** the extensive consultation process undertaken by DVA, which received positive feedback from various stakeholders.

Members **DISCUSSED** the significance of the extensive consultation process, highlighting that several ex-service organisations reported positive experiences and ongoing support in engaging with DVA.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
<b>2024YVF/A20</b> – Secretariat to Send link to FADT Committee report to YVF members.	Secretariat

### **Agenda Item 7      Rates between DVA, NDIA and Aged Care**

Members **NOTED** Recommendation 71 of the Royal Commission Final Report which calls for DVA health fees to be aligned with those that are paid by the NDIS. Members **NOTED** the contents of the paper and its attachments, acknowledging the complexity of direct comparison between DVA health service fees and those paid by other purchasers of health services, such as the NDIS and aged care.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** that while the intent to compare DVA and NDIS rates was valid, such comparisons may inadvertently undermine the distinct operational frameworks and financial structures underpinning each system.

Members **DISCUSSED** the necessity of addressing the broader systemic issues impacting service provision to veterans, emphasising the importance of understanding provider perceptions regarding the accessibility and complexity of the DVA system. Members **AGREED** that a focused strategy should be devised to engage with service providers, aiming to bridge gaps in communication and streamline process.

Members **RECOGNISED** the value of technological advancements that could mitigate the administrative burden faced by providers, thereby enhancing service delivery to veterans.

## Agenda Item 8 DVA Strategic Update

Members **NOTED** the strategic update provided by DVA Secretary Frame.

Members **NOTED** the Royal Commission recommends the establishment of an Independent Statutory Body to enhance oversight and service delivery to the veteran population. Members agreed the need for a comprehensive transition agency that effectively manages all aspects of veteran transition while ensuring seamless service delivery.

Members **EXPRESSED** concerns about the current Information Communication Technology (ICT) systems within DVA and **NOTED** that existing systems do not effectively communicate with each other, leading to service delivery challenges. Members **DISCUSSED** the financial implications of upgrading ICT systems and **ACKNOWLEDGED** the significant investment required for modernisation.

Members **NOTED** the importance of consulting with partner nations, including Canada and the UK, which have faced similar issues and **AGREED** that leveraging international best practices could provide valuable insights into identifying scalable options to present to the government.

Members **DISCUSSED** the need to strengthen networks with Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) to enhance community and support systems for veterans and **NOTED** that a more genuine partnership between DVA and the ESO Community is crucial for effective service delivery.

## Agenda Item 9 Compensation Claims Processing Update and Time Taken to Process

Members **NOTED** the update on claims processing activities.

Members **NOTED** the increase in accepted claims and the subsequent increase in self-lodged impairment claims for conditions that typically would not qualify for permanent impairment compensation and the effect of this on processing times. Members **DISCUSSED** potential ways to communicate to veterans and advocates a nuanced approach to lodging claims for initial liability while still in service, immediately post injury/incident, and holding over permanent impairment claims until discharge.

Members **AGREED** that providing comprehensive information about the claims process could reduce confusion and improve the quality of submissions. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** that claims lodged at different stages of a veteran's life may yield varying outcomes and emphasised the importance of being well-informed about the implications of such decisions.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** that ongoing communication with veterans, especially during transition periods, is crucial and the necessity for DVA representatives to conduct outreach initiatives, including visits to bases and transition seminars, to foster better understanding and engagement with the claims process.

## Agenda Item 10 Supporting Clinicians Who Care for Veterans

Members **NOTED** the presentation provided by Dr. Dan Corkery on Supporting Clinicians Who Care for Veterans.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the underutilisation of veteran healthcare programs by General Practitioners (GP) and **NOTED** and **DISCUSSED** the significant potential of the Veteran Health Check Program, and the potential for increased participation in this program among eligible participants, as it remains underutilised.

Members **NOTED** the importance of integrating education on veteran specific issues into medical training and curriculum improvements, specifically for GPs and **NOTED** the introduction of online educational modules aimed at improving GP familiarity with veteran issues.

Members **AGREED** on the importance of streamlining care services for veterans transitioning from military to civilian health systems and **ACKNOWLEDGED** the critical role of the Open Arms support service, which focuses on mental health and wellness for veterans and their families.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
2024YVF/A21 - Presentation from Dr. Corkery on 'Supporting clinicians who care for veterans' to be distributed to members.	Secretariat

## Agenda Item 11 Veterans in Custody

Members **NOTED** the update from Mr Christopher Tilley from the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation.

Members **NOTED** the current status and developments regarding veterans in custody, highlighting the ongoing review of the South Australian Strategy by Military Emergency Services and Health Australia. Members **NOTED** the review will consist of a literature review focused on veterans in custody, an action plan review, and a comparison of general data on the veterans' prison population versus the general prison population.

Members **AGREED** that the appointment of a dedicated DVA Prison Servicing Officer has been a significant asset, providing a single point of contact for relevant issues and emphasised the efficacy of this model for improving support services.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the success of the Veteran Incarceration Policy Working Group and the development of an inter-jurisdictional working group encompassing DVA and various justice departments across Australia. Members **NOTED** the positive engagement from DVA, Western Australia Corrections, South Australia Corrections, New South Wales Corrections and Queensland Corrections, with plans to include Tasmanian Corrections.

Members collectively **RECOGNISED** Mr. Christopher Tilley's commendable leadership and dedication to improving outcomes for veterans in custody. Mr Christopher Tilley thanked the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation for supporting this initiative.

## Agenda Item 12 Other Business

Members **NOTED** that the effective communication strategy implemented by ESORT, which includes the release of a communique that summarises key points discussed during their meetings. This approach enhances transparency and keeps the broader community informed about ongoing developments.

Members **DISCUSSED** and **AGREED** to adopt a similar strategy for the YVF, emphasising the importance of raising awareness within the veteran community regarding the ongoing forums and key discussions.

Members **NOTED** the issues regarding the Provider Upload Page (PUP) intended for lodging household service claims. Members **DISCUSSED** the constraints of the current system, specifically the limitation allowing only a single document submission per claim. Members **HIGHLIGHTED** that the inability to attach multiple documents hampers the efficiency of the claims process.

Members **AGREED** on the importance for system improvements to enable the attachment of multiple documents to facilitate a more streamlined claim submission process.

Members **NOTED** the further work being undertaken on the Afghan Scoping Study **NOTING** the progress made by the Returned and Services League (RSL). The project is set to undertake a longitudinal study similar in intent to the Vietnam Veterans and Families study released in 2007. Members **AGREED** the need to ensure families affected by the conflict are represented and collective agreement was made to prioritise giving these families a voice, acknowledging their often-overlooked contributions and experiences throughout the war.

Action Item and Description	Responsible
2024YVF/A22 – Implementation of a post meeting summary to capture key discussions and decisions made during each meeting.	Secretariat
2024YVF/A23 – Update to be provided at the next YVF meeting on the 'Provider Upload Page' process.	Client Benefits

Meeting closed: 2:30pm

Annexure A

Members	
Mr. Kahlil Fegan DSC, AM	Chair, Repatriation Commissioner
GPCAPT Wesley Perrett (P)	Defence Group People
Mr. Christopher Tilley	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Mr. James Dallas	Returned and Services League of Australia
Mr. James Milliss	Soldier On
Mr. Matthew Bondarczuk RAN RTD	Australian Veterans Alliance
Mr. Nick Russon	Australian Special Air Service Association
Mr. Scott Harris	The Warrior's Return
Ms. Barbara Boyer	Legacy Australia Inc
Ms. Emma Whitehead	Mates4Mates
Ms. Jessica Sullivan (V)	Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans' Association
Ms. Monique Suters (V)	Defence Families Australia
SQNLDR Dee Cherry (V)	Air Force Association
Presenters	
Dr. Dan Corkery	Senior Medical Officer, Media Adviser Section (Item 10)
Mr. Alexander Caroly	Assistant Secretary, Chief Data Officer, Data and Insights (Item 9)
Mr. Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy (Items 4, 5, 6, and 7)
Ms. Alison Frame	Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs (Item 8)
Ms. Tara Hatzismalis	Assistant Secretary, Processing (Item 3 and 9)
Observers	
Mr. Marc Diploc (V)	Salute of Service
Mr. Mike von Berg MC OAM	Ex-Service Organisation Round Table member
Mr. Peter Kennedy (V)	Young Veterans Australia
Ms. Lucinda Casey (V)	Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Mr. Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform (Item 6)
Ms. Tara Cavanagh	First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits (Item 3 and 9)
Secretariat	
Ms. Lorien S	Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms. Jessica L	Secretariat Support Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations
Apologies	
COL James Burns CSM	ADF Liaison Officer to DVA, Department of Defence
LCDR Graham Thomas RAN Rtd	Naval Association of Australia

**Legend:**

(V) – virtual attendance

No symbol – attendance in person

(P) – nominated proxy

Next Meeting – TBC 2025