MINUTES

# Agenda Item 1. Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the year and noted apologies from Mr Kevin Davidson. The Chair welcomed Deputy Chair Ms Leanne Cameron, First Assistant Secretary, Client Engagement and Support Services Division and new members Mr Ward Gainey and Mr Michael Benyk after Mr Milton Kirk and Mr Graham Anderson stepped down as members.

The Chair advised members of the teleconferencing protocols and encouraged members to continue providing submissions to the Secretariat.

# Agenda Item 2. Minutes & Actions Arising

The minutes of the 26 November 2019 NACCF meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to close all action items, except for action item 109, which is to remain open.

**Agenda Item 3. Strategic Update - Priorities for 2020**

1. **COVID-19 update**

The Chair provided an update on COVID-19 pandemic and explained the benefits to Veterans from the Government stimulus package, he also provided information on how the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) is responding to this crisis. By limiting contact and the distancing rules, DVA are pausing face-to-face contact at Veteran Access Network (VAN) offices and operating by phone contact, most staff working from home.

1. **National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention and Veteran Family Advocate**

The Chair informed the members on the appointment process of the National Commission for Defence and Veteran Suicide. They will have similar powers to a Royal Commission and make findings and recommendations to the Government. Public reporting will be delivered through an Annual Veteran and Defence Suicide Death Report to Parliament.

The Independent Review of Past Suicides, will be undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care will undertake the review with an Interim Report to be delivered to the Government within 12 months and a Final Report in 18 months.

Members were also updated with information regarding the Veteran Family Advocate (VFA) and the selection process which will commence shortly. This role will be similar to the Commissioner of the Repatriation Commission. The VFA will engage directly with families and provide their perspective to assist and inform policy decisions and their implementation.

1. **Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The members were briefed on status of the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan (Action Plan) from the Chair, DVA received many excellent and thoughtful ideas and suggestions which have been included in a draft plan and has been distributed to a range of stakeholders with academic, clinical and service-delivery expertise for review and feedback. This has included:

* + the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Veterans’ Mental Health;
  + the Veterans Ministerial Council;
  + the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists;
  + the Australian Psychological Society;
  + the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners;
  + the Australian Medical Association; and
  + attendees from the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit convened by Minister Chester in June 2019.

As a final step in the consultation process, DVA consulted across government in the development of the Action Plan—with Ms Christine Morgan (National Suicide Prevention Adviser) and the National Suicide Prevention Taskforce, and the Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Attorney-General, Defence and Health.

Ms McCabe enquired if the Council on the Aging (COTA) was part of the consultation process, the Chair explained that it was distributed to a wide range of different bodies as this strategy is for all veterans not just for one group and which focusses on the wellness strategy.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2020/121 | Pat McCabe would like further information on who was consulted regarding the Action Plan. | Moira Campbell |

1. **Improved administration**

The Chair provided an update on the Productivity Commission (PC) Report, on 5 February 2020, the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the Hon Darren Chester MP, stated that the Government is in the process of finalising its response to the PC and its recommendations and that it will be part of Budget considerations this year. The May budget has now been re-scheduled to October as a result of   
COVID-19. The final report makes 69 recommendations and 26 findings to be considered by the Government. It calls for the system of veteran support to focus on the lifetime wellbeing of veterans, and for significant reforms across structures, governance, legislation, policy, and service delivery. The proposed reforms encompass the whole system, not just DVA and Defence, but also other government agencies, ex-service organisations, and service providers with serving and ex-serving members and their families at the centre. This is a substantial report looking at a complex system.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2020/122 | DVA to circulate invites to Members to Webinars. | Mark Garrity |

1. **Respect and Recognition**

The Chair provided an update on the Veterans Recognition Package (VRP), there has been a good uptake on the program, since the launch in November 2019, our partner the Australian Partners of Defence (APoD) has had over 43,500 Veteran Card holders join and over 300 additional businesses signing up to provide offers to veteran card holders. There have been a few technical issues but these are being sorted and worked through as they occur.

Members expressed that a few of their clients had not received their VRP package after applying late last year. The Chair apologised on behalf of DVA and stated that this was unacceptable and asked members to forward details to the Secretariat of anyone who has any issues with accessing VRP, in order to forward to follow up with the business area.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2020/123 | Provide statistics of take up of various offers taken up by Australian Partners of Defence (APOD). | Mark Garrity |

# Agenda Item 4. Chief Health Officer Update

Dr Trish Batchelor, Acting Chief Officer provided members with a comprehensive update on initiatives and priorities for the Chief Health Officer. It has been a difficult start to the year with the bush fires, air quality and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr Firman is currently seconded to the Department of Health (DoH) working on the current virus situation, Australia is in a great position, flattening the curve of the corona virus outbreak. The Pandemic Taskforce meet daily, these meetings are with Senior Official’s from a variety of Government Departments they then provide an update to their Departments.

Dr Batchelor informed members that visits with general practitioners (GPs) have dropped by 70% and reminded them of the importance of continuing with ongoing treatments using tele-health services provided by their GP, the importance of having your flu shots and the options of scripts being home delivered.

There is also a big focus on mental health as there are likely to be long term effects from the pandemic self-isolation. Currently Open Arms wait times have decreased considerably, its only 18 seconds to speak to someone after hours and 29 seconds to connect to someone for a face-to-face telehealth appointment.

**Agenda Item 5. Department of Health (DoH) Update:**

1. **Summary of DoH COVID-19 actions and communications to aged care providers and residential facilities**
2. **DVA – DoH communication channels during the pandemic**

Mr James Benson from DoH provided Members with an update on the current work being undertaken by DoH in relation to Covid-19 involving a taskforce group with regular meetings. There is also a daily newsletter placed on the Aged Care Website and we encourage everyone to sign up to receive these newsletters and access the Webinars.

Members expressed concerns with procedures in place for veterans receiving in-home care/domestic services regarding protection equipment and using necessary precautions. They also enquired if there

a was a procedure in place for house bound veterans to access testing if they had Covid-19 symptoms.

Dr Batchelor advised that they contact their GP first who will advise if they need to get tested and may request a home visit from a pathologist to enable testing.

Mr Benson provided a thorough update on additional funding from the Government for retaining staff in nursing homes and Commonwealth support for people living at home with more meals on wheels services being available.

# Agenda Item 6. Royal Commissions into Aged Care and Disability Update

Ms Carley Partridge, Assistant Secretary, External Scrutiny and Policy Performance Branch, provided an update on the Royal Commissions, all hearings and pubic events have been suspended as a consequence of the evolving coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Note some activities of both the Commissions continue, submission deadlines have been extended to 30 June 2020 under the Aged Care Royal Commission. At this stage there is no change to the date for the release of the final report of the Aged Care Royal Commission, which is 12 November 2020. The Disability Royal Commission continues to accept submissions by phone, in writing or through audio or video recordings.

DVA remains fully committed to supporting the work of the Aged Care and Disability Royal Commissions, and responding to any requests for information or to give evidence.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2020/124 | DVA to provide additional information - statement of concerns/media releases. | Carly Partridge |

# Agenda Item 7. Aged Care Resources

Mr Mark Garrity, Assistant Secretary from Client Programs Branch, provided information to members about the video link that was emailed to them and asked if they had any questions.

Members agreed that the video was informative and a useful tool and enquired if they could forward to their cohorts.

He also briefed members on the work being done with DoH’s Aged Care Navigator Trial and to support our client’s ageing journey, DVA has produced two booklets:

* + The veteran’s guide to living independently – Accessing DVA services; and
  + The veteran’s guide to moving into an aged-care home – Accessing DVA services.

In addition, there are a broad range of information products being developed. DVA has partnered with the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) to develop a series of eight webinar and two information videos (Services for veterans and their families and Introduction to DVA services), one for consumers and the other for health providers, these will be used in full and cut-down formats for use on social media platforms.

* Webinar topics include information about:
  + the Coordinated Veterans’ Care Program;
  + Veterans’ Home Care;
  + Community Nursing program;
  + Moving into an aged care home with the support of DVA; and
  + Managing your care and services in an aged care home.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID crisis, these are on hold including the release of the two booklets.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2020/125 | DVA to send link to video for members to pass on to their members/cohort. | Mark Garrity |

# Agenda item 8. Other Business

The Chair asked members to review the National Aged and Community Care Forum (NACCF) Terms of Reference (ToRs) as these will be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, 16 June 2020.

# Meeting close

The Chair thanked all members for their attendance and participation. The meeting closed at 11.30am. The next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, 16 June 2020** and will be held as a teleconference/ video conference format, depending on the COVID-19 situation. The Chair hoped members and their families continue to stay safe and healthy and reminded them to reach out to Open Arms if they or their members need support during this difficult time.