



## Operational Working Party « OWP » Terms of Reference

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### Operational Working Party – Terms of Reference

#### Background

The Operational Working Party (OWP) is one forum of the National Consultation Framework (NCF). The NCF is a comprehensive consultative structure designed to facilitate communication between the veteran and ex-service community, their families, the Repatriation and Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commissions, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

#### Objectives

The OWP will:

- enhance the ex-service community's understanding of DVA's service delivery performance through information sharing and improved communication between DVA and the ex-service community;
- be a forum for claims and wellbeing advocacy support organisations to discuss concerns arising from the delivery of DVA services;
- identify and provide recommendations for improvements in operational policy to promote quality and accountability in service delivery; and
- deliver innovative solutions to systemic issues and drive changes to policy needed to assist veterans.

Representatives should currently be working/volunteering in capacity as a claims or wellbeing advocate. It is preferred that representatives have a good understanding of DVA programs and policies that support service delivery operations. Representatives should also possess knowledge and expertise in pensions, compensation and welfare advocacy.

#### Chair

The Chair of the OWP will be the Deputy Secretary Veteran and Family Services Group, and Deputy Chair is the First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division.

#### Membership

Members of the OWP may be drawn from or nominated by the following organisations:

- Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Servicemen and Women;
- Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association;
- Australian Special Air Service Association;
- Australian Veterans Alliance
- Defence Force Welfare Association;
- Legacy Australia Incorporated;
- Naval Association of Australia;
- Partners of Veterans' Association;
- Returned and Services League of Australia;
- Australian Air Force Association Ltd.;
- Royal Australian Regiment Corporation;
- Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia;
- Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia;
- Australian War Widows' Incorporated

### **Developing agenda & meeting process**

The agenda will be constructed in consultation with members and DVA will facilitate participation by relevant subject matter experts from the department.

The Department and members commit to working together. Discussions will be collaborative and all parties will work together to assist veterans and their families.

Should an item be raised that is more appropriately the mandate of a different Committee, it will be referred to it (e.g., NACCF). A response will be required within six months of the referral being received.

Submissions should be clear about the nature of the issue being raised, supported by the right evidence (maintaining privacy of individual clients), and state the desired outcome.

The Chair will ensure that each agenda item reaches a resolution which is recorded in the minutes. This may include for example, to agree and support, disagree/not support, refer to a subject matter expert for advice, or seek guidance from ESORT or the Departmental Executive.

The Chair will ensure the meetings are conducted in accordance with the time allocated to each item, but allowing flexibility when appropriate.

From time to time OWP may discuss matters which require a confidentiality clause. These will be clearly identified for members. Should members identify a conflict of interest or be unable to participate for any reason, members are able to absent themselves from those discussions.

The Department will respond before future meetings should any changes be made as a result of OWP discussion.

### **Member roles and responsibilities**

- Members are expected to be available for meetings; however if this is not possible, a proxy can be appointed. If an organisation's representative is unable to attend three consecutive meetings, the OWP Chair may request a discussion with that member to review that organisation's membership on the forum.
- Members or their proxies are expected to prepare for meetings by ensuring familiarity with the agenda topics and background papers if available.
- Members or their proxies are representatives of their organisations and are encouraged to raise any matter of concern. They should have a good knowledge of their organisation's position, policies and programs to enable informed discussion. If a member has a personal issue, this should be raised through separate channels with DVA.
- Members may also take the opportunity, where appropriate, to consult directly with the DVA Executive on sensitive matters.
- Members or their proxies are expected to observe the 'Chatham House' rule and the confidentiality of sensitive discussions during a forum meeting.
- Members or their proxies must disclose or take reasonable steps to avoid any conflict of interest (real or apparent) in connection with their appointment to or attendance at OWP meetings.
- There is a mutual obligation on forum members, their proxies and the organisations they represent to make every effort to disseminate outcomes and relevant information arising from the NCF forum meetings to their membership and the broader ex-service community in a timely manner.

### **Departmental roles and responsibilities**

- DVA will schedule meetings at the beginning of each calendar year however, meeting may be subject to change and DVA will endeavour to provide advice of rescheduling as soon as practicable.
- DVA will provide meeting papers electronically and no less than five business days prior to the scheduled meeting and distribute minutes and publicly available meeting summaries within four weeks of a meeting.

If the subject matter is complex requiring research and consultation by the member, additional time may need to be provided.

- In accordance with the NCF Communication Protocol, DVA will provide communication products which capture meeting outcomes and related information and make these available to forum members and the broader ex-service community through appropriately accessible communication channels in a timely manner, including the OWP page on the Department's internet.
- DVA will arrange and finance the travel and accommodation costs associated with the attendance of members or their proxies to the OWP. These entitlements, as well as travel and meal allowances, will be provided in accordance with the departmental travel policy for non-Senior Executive Service level staff as detailed in the *Secretary's Instruction – Domestic travel for other than APS employees*.
- The payment of meal and travel allowances will be paid, along with any authorised reimbursements within 30 days of the conclusion of the meeting. DVA will not reimburse surface travel costs or parking for individuals who reside in the same city as the meeting.
- DVA will cover taxi costs from home to the closest airport for departure to the meeting location; from the arrival airport to a member's (or their proxy's) accommodation (as applicable); from the accommodation to the meeting location and return. DVA will consider payment of a motor vehicle allowance upon application. Receipts for taxis or airport parking must be provided to DVA within 14 days after each meeting to enable a single payment into the member's or proxy's nominated account.
- DVA will provide a safe working environment in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) provisions.

### **Recognition of other key stakeholders**

The OWP will have the flexibility to invite additional participants to the areas of focus or specific agenda items. This can include (but is not limited to) representation from the following recognised stakeholder groups, which are important contributors to and influencers of the provision of support and services to the veteran and ex-service community now and have an anticipated role in the future.

Commonwealth Government: Department of Defence; Department of Health; Australian Tax Office; Comsuper; Department of Human Services; Department of Social Services; Department of Education and Training, Department of Employment; Australian Federal Police; and the Australian War Memorial.

State and territory governments: Veterans' agencies.

Industry: health service providers, tertiary institutions.

### **Referrals**

The OWP can refer any matter to another national forum and/or state-based forums for consideration. State-based forums can equally refer issues to the OWP for consideration.

As deemed appropriate by the Chair and assessed on a case-by-case basis, matters may also be referred from the OWP to other consultative bodies to which DVA contributes and that exist outside the National Consultation Framework. A response will be requested within six months of referral being received.

### **Review**

The terms of reference and organisational membership for this forum will be reviewed at the last meeting of each year and also every third year as part of the review of the National Consultation Framework. The next review will be decided at the meeting scheduled for 15 November 2023.