



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

transforming
DVA

DVA Feedback Policy

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Introduction

This Feedback Policy (the Policy) outlines the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Department, DVA) approach to managing feedback. The Department welcomes complaints, compliments and suggestions about the services, actions, policies and procedures we provide and how we deliver them. This helps us improve the way we do things. We listen to everyone including veterans and their families, providers, representatives and people interested in veteran matters.

The Policy underpins our commitment to acknowledge, investigate and respond to complaints and feedback, and to be open to opportunities to improve our systems and service. The Policy provides context for staff, and transparency for individuals about how the Department will respond to feedback in line with the Commonwealth Ombudsman guidelines for best practice in complaint management in the most efficient and appropriate way.

The Policy has been developed to align with the approach described in the Department's Service Charter, which describes what veterans, families and their representatives can expect from the Department, namely that the Department will:

- provide fair and unbiased assistance and decision making
- operate with courtesy, consideration and respect
- provide a clear explanation of the reasons for the decisions we have made
- respect your privacy, and keep your information confidential, unless disclosure is authorised or required by you or by law
- access and correct records held about you, subject to Commonwealth legislation
- provide information to assist you to nominate someone to act on your behalf
- provide information to support access to an advocate to represent you when liaising with DVA
- provide information about how to lodge a complaint.

Who is this for?

The Policy is for DVA staff and our stakeholders, including veterans and their families, representatives, service providers and people interested in veteran matters. While the Department's Feedback Management Team manages most feedback and the system used to record feedback, many other staff are involved in resolving and responding to feedback. All staff should familiarise themselves with this document to ensure they respond to, and document, feedback in line with this Policy.

Purpose

The Policy describes the principles that underpin the way we manage feedback. It also provides a framework to support staff assisting individuals who lodge feedback. In turn, individuals who provide feedback will understand what to expect from the Department during the feedback process.

The Policy is based on the Commonwealth Ombudsman best practice complaint management principles and has been developed to:

- Align with DVA's Service Charter and Corporate Plan,
- Assist with referrals to external scrutiny bodies, including the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), Health Ombudsman, Office of the Australian Information Commission (OAIC) or Australian Human Rights Commission.

Background

DVA's Service Charter is a public statement that outlines what clients can expect from us, and how clients can help us to serve them better. Developed in consultation with the veteran community, Ex-Service Organisations and our staff, the Service Charter states DVA's commitment to providing a responsive, quality service. Data drawn from records of complaints and compliments gives insight into how well we are meeting the standards expected of us and what we can improve.

What is Feedback?

DVA feedback includes complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement about a particular service, experience or event. Typically, it will involve a specific transaction with either DVA or one of our service providers.

Complaints and suggestions help us refine and improve our policies, processes and systems. Compliments help us recognise when we are meeting or exceeding community standards for service and performance.

Complaints

A complaint as defined by the Commonwealth Ombudsman is:

'An implied or express statement of dissatisfaction where a response is sought, reasonable to expect or legally required.'

Complaint categories

A complaint is dissatisfaction with DVA or providers/contractors:

Services	Accessibility of services
	Quality of services
	Treatment by staff
Actions or decisions	Incorrect or unfair
	Reasons not properly explained
	Not responding to requests or applications
Inaction or delay	Delay providing services
	Inaction or delays not explained
Policy or processes	Disagreement with policy or process
	Not properly explained

What is not a complaint?

1. An initial request for a service or action. Subsequent requests may be an implicit complaint about service, inaction or delay.
2. Statements about an overall opinion, unless a response or resolution is expected, or should reasonably be provided.
3. Requests for information or explanations. Repeated requests for explanations may be implied complaints about the quality of services, decisions or reasons previously provided.
4. Requests for updates. Some requests for updates may be implied complaints about delay or inaction.
5. Formal review requests under legislated review mechanisms, including a disagreement with a decision that has a formal avenue of appeal. However, if a disagreement includes a complaint about the service provided by DVA during its decision-making, a complaint should be recorded.
6. An allegation of fraud.

Compliments

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction or appreciation about DVA's staff, services or service providers on a specific occasion or relating to a particular matter. Compliments can be praise or congratulations about our program delivery, services or staff performance. DVA will recognise good work and pass on compliments to staff via their managers or contract supervisors.

Suggestions for improvement

Suggestions are ideas on how we could improve our services or do our business differently. All suggestions for improvements will be forwarded to the managers of the relevant business areas for consideration.

Who can provide feedback?

Anyone can provide complaints, compliments or suggestions for improvements about DVA including:

- Veterans
- War widows and widowers
- Family members
- Carers
- Third party representatives, including Advocates or those with Power of Attorney
- Ex-Service Organisations
- Contracted service providers
- Members of professional associations
- The general public

We take anonymous complaints as seriously as any other complaint and we will investigate them, where possible. An anonymous complaint may mean that we won't be able to communicate the resolution to the complainant.

Anyone can lodge a complaint on behalf of another person, such as a family member, advocate, or another organisation. However, a client's personal information can only be accessed with that person's consent.

Complaints and enquires from members of parliament are addressed through the ministerial process.

Feedback principles

Principle 1: Engage with a trauma-informed approach

We understand that when an applicant seeks access to information they may be experiencing a traumatic time in their life. Underpinned by the principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment, we will provide support to the applicant through the process of accessing information. This means we are aware of the impacts of trauma, will listen to the applicant and consider their unique experience. We will aim to make the engagement smoother and less stressful. The Feedback Management Team will also liaise with the department's Coordinated Client Support Team where appropriate to seek additional support for clients with complex needs.

Principle 2: Accessibility

DVA will widely publicise its complaints and feedback management system and how to access it. Where required, staff will provide further assistance to enable people who need additional help to lodge feedback and make complaints.

When resolving feedback we aim to establish and maintain respectful and productive relationships with every individual who accesses our programs and services. As part of this, our staff, our veterans and other clients share mutual rights and responsibilities as outlined in our Mutually Respectful Behaviour Policy.

Principle 3: Confidentiality

All staff will protect the privacy and confidentiality of complainants, enabling complaints to be lodged without fear of negative consequences and no one will suffer such consequences because they lodge a complaint. Anonymous feedback can be accepted, but this may limit the response that can be provided.

The information that we collect, hold and release is important and we have systems and strategies in place to manage its integrity, security and accessibility. This means that we check proof of identity before we release personal information. We will also ask that consent to release information to others be considered at key life events to reflect the veteran's situation and preferences.

Our information governance arrangements include our Privacy Policy, the Cybersecurity Policy 2022, Records Management Policy in addition to compliance with the Privacy Act and the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs), FOI Act, *Archives Act 1983 (Cth)*, *Public Sector Act 1999* and the Australian Public Service Commission Code of Conduct.

Principle 4: Fairness and Equity

All complaints will be judged on merit and not be biased in favour of the complainant or any staff member involved. Those lodging complaints will be given the opportunity to have their complaints handled by an officer not previously involved in the original issue. Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly and professionally.

Principle 5: Effectiveness

Responses to complaints will deal with all the issues raised and provide suitable outcomes. The information collected will be used to improve services whenever possible.

Principle 6: Regular Review

DVA will regularly review the complaints and feedback handling process to ensure the accuracy of record keeping. Regular reporting to senior executive will provide information on feedback performance.

How to provide feedback and feedback channels

You are able to make a complaint, compliment or provide feedback about any business area, service provided or staff member in DVA. DVA encourages matters to be raised with the person directly in the first instance, as they may be able to resolve the issue. If you are not satisfied with the response, the matter can be escalated to a manager. This allows for any concerns to be addressed promptly. If you are still not satisfied with the response the next step is to lodge formal feedback. There are a number of channels through which the Department receives feedback including:

MyService

The online portal MyService enables registered users including veterans and/or their nominated representatives to self-serve and lodge feedback. A feedback reference number is provided immediately on lodgement to acknowledge the feedback has been received by the Department.

DVA Website online form

The online feedback form on DVA's website (www.dva.gov.au/about/feedback) enables anyone to lodge feedback, including anonymously. A feedback reference number is provided immediately to acknowledge the feedback has been received by the Department.

Email

Emails can be sent to feedback@dva.gov.au. This mailbox is monitored during normal business hours and an acknowledgement email, along with a reference number, will be provided once it is recorded in the Department's Client Feedback Management System.

Telephone

Telephone 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372). Feedback received by telephone is recorded in the Client Feedback Management System. The staff member receiving your call will record your feedback and provide you with a feedback reference number.

In Person

Talk to a DVA staff member in person at a DVA office or shop front, or Veteran Support Officer on an Australian Defence Force base. Feedback received in person is recorded in the Client Feedback Management System.

Post

Mail addressed to:

Feedback Management Team
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
Brisbane QLD 4001

Note: If there are concerns about the security of your personal information, you may prefer to use registered mail. Feedback received by postal mail is recorded in the Client Feedback Management System.

Information needed to help resolve complaints

To help DVA respond quickly and effectively to complaints, complainants will be asked to:

1. Provide as much detail as possible about the situation and any action that has been taken to try to resolve the issues. Information that may be helpful includes:
 - Letters or other correspondence that have been received or sent
 - Names of staff members and dates that contact was made with DVA
 - Details of discussions with staff or advocates
 - Applications that have been lodged
 - Services that have been used.

2. Provide details of any DVA service providers that complainants have contacted and the provider's actions and responses. In many instances the service standards of professional providers are governed by industry bodies and DVA is bound by the standards and governing principles of those bodies. Complainants, not DVA will need to direct issues to these bodies if necessary. However, feedback helps DVA monitor the services of its contracted providers.
3. Tell DVA what you would like done to successfully resolve the matter. DVA will try to provide satisfactory outcomes for complainants; however, this may not always be possible.

What we do when feedback is lodged

The Complaints Process

The Department is committed to supporting clients to reach the best possible outcome for their complaint. This means we will:

- Promptly register complaints in the Client Feedback Management System (CFMS)
- Assess and prioritise complaints based on the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised
- Assign to the appropriate business area for investigation, explanation and resolution
- Inform the complainant as soon as possible of their CFMS reference number, the expected timeframes for our actions, the progress of their complaint and reasons for any delay
- Employ a robust Quality Assurance process before finalising a complaint.

If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security, the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately in line with DVA's protocols for dealing with clients at risk.

When managing feedback we employ the 7 stages of Complaint Handling as outlined in the Commonwealth Ombudsmen's Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide, which includes:

1. Feedback acknowledged promptly
2. Feedback is assessed and assigned priority
3. An investigation planned and the client informed
4. The investigation resolves factual issues and options for resolution considered
5. The response is clear and informative
6. External review option provided if the client is dissatisfied
7. Systemic issues should be investigated and acted upon

Service standards

DVA is committed to dealing with complaints quickly and learning from them. We will strive to deal with any complaint at the first point of contact wherever possible, but in many instances it will be necessary to pass on the details to a specific business area for further investigation and resolution.

Our commitment is that we will:

- Acknowledge a complaint within three working days of receipt
- Keep the client informed of progress
- Communicate the resolution to the person making the complaint within 28 working days. If the matter is complex, this may take longer. If this is the case, DVA will ensure complainants are provided with the contact details of the officer or area assigned to manage their complaint, and will keep them informed of progress and an expected resolution date.

Unreasonable client demands or behaviours

DVA recognises complaints are a valuable source of feedback to improve our services. However, there may be occasions when the Department receives unreasonable demands or behaviours from clients, including:

- Where a complainant raises the same issues that have been investigated previously, or pursues a complaint without presenting new evidence
- Unreasonable persistence regarding outcomes, apologies or resolutions
- Unreasonable or repeated demands for escalation to senior managers
- Unreasonable demands relating to timeframes for resolution
- Complaints that are frivolous or vexatious, or not made in good faith (i.e. complaints raised without substance, or to cause disruption to departmental operations or provocation, including intentionally annoying or harassing staff).

In such instances, complaints may not be registered and DVA may take action to minimise or control its dealings with clients engaging in this kind of behaviour. If this occurs, DVA will ensure the complainant is provided with clear advice and reasons as to why such action is taken.

DVA will also inform the complainant of other external complaint avenues to pursue.

Further information on the way DVA manages unreasonable complainant conduct is detailed in our Mutually Respectful Behaviour Policy.

Specific complaint matters and external referrals

Complaints about contracted service providers

DVA will investigate the complaint through its contract management processes. We will aim to satisfy complainants' concerns as quickly as possible. However, we may redirect concerns regarding specialist treatment accessed through DVA's Health Cards to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), Health Ombudsman or relevant state health commission. Refer to the section on External Complaint Channels for further information.

Complaints about privacy breaches

The complaint will be recorded in the Client Feedback Management System, and then forwarded to the DVA Privacy Officer for investigation. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, a complaint may also be lodged in writing with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner or by completing an online form at www.privacy.gov.au.

Complaints about lack of access to your personal information

The complaint will be recorded in the Client Feedback Management System and then forwarded to DVA's Information Access Unit for investigation.

We proactively release non-personal information on our website through the Information Publication Scheme, Freedom of Information (FOI) Disclosure Log and media releases.

We will endeavor to be as open as possible when information we hold is requested and to provide the information in a timely manner. There are certain provisions in the *Freedom of Information Act* (FOI Act) 1982, the *Privacy Act* (Privacy Act) 1988 and other legislation that may restrict our ability to provide some information upon request. Where we are unable to provide access to the requested information, an explanation of the decision will be provided and any rights of review will be explained.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied, a complaint may be lodged with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal on 1300 366 700 or via the internet at www.aat.gov.au.

Complaints about discrimination

The complaint will be recorded in the Client Feedback Management System and will be investigated by a senior independent officer. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, a complaint may also be lodged with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, or the Australian Human Rights Commission on 1300 656 419 or via the internet at www.hreoc.gov.au.

External complaint channels

We can't always provide the solution a client would like as the Department is bound by legislation and policies. No matter the outcome, we will always explain our decisions and ensure the client, or their representative, understands the options they may have for a review of our actions. This can include making contact with the:

- Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)
- Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint, they will be advised they can also contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

In general, the Commonwealth Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative actions of Australian Government departments and agencies including DVA. Generally, the Ombudsman will not, and in some cases cannot, investigate complaints until they have been raised with the agency. The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on 1300 362 072 or via the internet at www.ombudsman.gov.au.

We may also recommend the complainant contact the Office of the Health Ombudsman. The Health Ombudsman serves as an independent authority that oversees complaints and conducts investigations into health service-related matters. They aim to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability in the healthcare system. The Health Ombudsman can be contacted on 1300 795 265.

Complaints against individual General Practitioners (GPs) should be brought to the attention of the relevant state regulatory agency or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). AHPRA can be contacted on 1300 419 495 or at www.ahpra.gov.au

Consent to release information

The Department may at times require consent to disclose information although there are circumstances where consent is not legally required. For example the Department may be compelled through legislation or court processes to produce information. Consent can be provided as 'express consent' either verbally or in writing, or 'implied consent' which may reasonably be inferred in the circumstances from the conduct of the individual.

When obtaining consent, the four key elements to consider are:

1. The individual is adequately informed before giving consent
2. The individual gives consent voluntarily
3. The consent is current and specific, and
4. The individual has the capacity to understand and communicate their consent.

Policy owner

The owner of this Policy is the First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, Engagement and Communications Division.

Review date

This Policy will be reviewed again before December 2024.