



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table May 2024

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Tuesday 14 May, 2024. A range of issues were discussed during the meeting.

DVA update – Secretary Alison Frame

Secretary Frame provided ESORT members an update of the Department's priority areas. DVA notes the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will present their Final Report and recommendations to the Governor-General in September this year. DVA continues to work hard to respond to requests for information to support the Royal Commission to conclude their work. DVA is also undertaking work to ensure the Department is well placed to rapidly enact the Government's response to the Final Report.

Secretary Frame stressed that the Royal Commission's findings would represent a valuable opportunity to innovate and reform the way the Department supports veterans into the future.

Secretary Frame also updated members on the work currently ongoing to process veteran's compensation claims. Secretary Frame acknowledged that significant work had been undertaken to clear the claims allocation backlog as defined in the Royal Commission's Interim Report. Now work is focused on clearing the claims determination backlog and ensuring that new claims are processed faster.

Legislative Reform update

ESORT was provided with an update on legislative reform. The formal consultation period on draft legislation released by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs for public comment on 28 February 2024 has closed. In total, 315 formal submissions were received. Government will now consider the feedback before the legislation is finalised and introduced to Parliament.

Advocacy update

ESORT received a report from the Working Group established in December 2023 to develop proposals for governance arrangements for a professional organisation for Advocates. The arrangements proposed by the Working Group include requirements in relation to initial and continuing training and conduct for claims and wellbeing advocates. Proposals from the Working Group will be subject to future government consideration and potential funding.

Update on medical expense privately incurred (MEPI) processes

The Medical Expenses Privately Incurred (MEPI) program allows veterans with an issued Gold or White Card to seek reimbursement for privately incurred expenses for medical treatment received outside normal Veteran Card arrangements. Increasingly, some veterans and ex-service organisations have raised concerns relating to how veterans can obtain necessary treatment in circumstances where providers do not accept DVA Card arrangements. ESORT was presented with three options on how DVA operational guidance could be amended to ensure more veterans are provided financial assistance and are able to access the medical treatments they need. Members provided feedback on the options that will be taken to the Repatriation Commission for consideration.

Hearing services

ESORT members received an update on improvements DVA is progressing to offer internal support for veterans with complex hearing needs, with a focus on aligning support with DVA's Wellbeing Framework. Since DVA's last update to ESORT, progress has also been made with an online survey, which is scheduled to go live in late May 2024. DVA has also worked with the Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC), which has conducted its own survey on what hearing requirements would best assist clients when engaging with

government agencies. DHAC is expected to provide further information on potential changes to enhance client experiences, which include:

- technologies and device categories available;
- device minimum specifications; and
- device supply arrangements.

Enhancing Access to Mental Health Services

ESORT members were briefed on progress made to enhance access to mental health services for veterans in Tasmania. DVA is working in partnership with the Tasmanian Mental Health and Alcohol Directorate and the Tasmanian PHN at a state level, and the DHAC and the PHNs at a national level, to establish methods to better identify veterans and refer them to Open Arms services. The intent is to reach members of the veteran community not previously known to DVA but who would benefit from Open Arms services. The initiative also includes a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Treatment and Recovery program, which began in Hobart on 30 April. A complementary program for families will begin at the end of May. These community-based programs will also be delivered in regions where veterans have historically struggled to get access to mental health services, with the next program to be run in Burnie.

Methods to better identify veterans and establish a referral pathway to Open Arms where appropriate are being piloted in Tasmania and will then be rolled out to other state and territory governments.

Claims processing update

The backlog of unallocated claims identified by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has been cleared, however the claims determination backlog is still the focus of DVA claims staff. The growth in service delivery staff (85.7 per cent since June 2022) has had a positive impact, with the number of determinations at a record high – 9,043 in March 2024, up by 36 per cent from March 2023. A range of initiatives, including MyService enhancements, the Compensation Medical Form Review project, and the updated claims processing webpage, continue to be implemented to improve the claims process and support the veteran community. DVA is focused on increasing productivity, reducing the time taken to process claims, and improving the overall claims experience for veterans and families while they work to continue to work to clear the claims determination backlog.

Release of client information to Ex-Service Organisations

ESORT members were updated on a change relating to the provision of client information to ESOs. ESORT endorsed DVA issuing a notification email to affected ESOs advising of the change to Death reports; and to also provide bereaved partners with the option of DVA facilitating contact with relevant ESOs.

Research and Evaluation Update

DVA is committed to evidence-led policy and program design, and to leverage good practice and expertise in the research and evaluation sector, both in Australia and internationally. DVA is developing a new model to strengthen the way it procures and utilises research and evaluation, and to increase the use of evidence in policy, program and service design, supporting translation and implementation opportunities that improve outcomes for veterans and families. DVA is intending to commence a procurement process in the near future to engage a new strategic partner(s) for veteran research in Australia.

Aged Care Update

In January 2024, the DVA Secretary announced the establishment of the DVA Aged and Community Care Taskforce (the Taskforce). The Taskforce, led by First Assistant Secretary Leanne Cameron, is implementing practical measures to improve support to veterans and families in the short term (including in relation to access to accurate and reliable information about service entitlements and availability), and working across Government on sustainable pathways to provide this support in the future. The Taskforce is consulting closely with NACCF members, and with industry providers and peak bodies. It is also continuing to manage continuing instability amongst service providers in the Veterans' Home Care and Community Nursing Programs to ensure ongoing access to these supports for eligible veterans.

Other Business

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

Lived Experience

The need for Veteran Liaison Officers in public hospitals

Potential for focused ESORT consideration of Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Final Report Recommendations