

Consultation Submission  
for the  
Proposed Australian Institute of  
Veterans' Advocates



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<b>Introduction-----</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>An Independent Institute/ Industry Body Is Essential-----</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Limitations of the Current ATDP Qualifications-----</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Lifting the Standard and Availability of Advocacy Services-----</b>	<b>7</b>
Investing in Excellence-----	8
Management and industry regulation of fee-based services - Fee vs Non- Fee Services-----	9
The Case for Qualifications in Legal and Financial Advisory-----	11
The Case for Qualifications and Navigating Medical Support/Patient Advocacy-----	12
The Case for Qualifications and Skills in Understanding the Broader Legislative Environment of Veteran Advocacy and Support.-----	13
Providing Access to Training and Professional Development-----	14
Establishing a Complaints Handling Process-----	15
Professionalising Veteran Advocacy Services-----	15
<b>Governance and Membership of the Institute-----</b>	<b>15</b>
Governance Structure-----	15
Membership Streams - expanding the context and coverage-----	16
A Starting Point for Developing Membership Categories-----	17
<b>Functions and Benefits of the Institute-----</b>	<b>19</b>
Accrediting and Registering Service Providers-----	19
Monitoring Service Delivery and Addressing Complaints-----	20
Contributing to Practitioner Training and Professional Development-----	20
Facilitating Professional Indemnity Insurance-----	20
Workforce Planning-----	20
<b>Professional Standards for Veteran Support and Advocacy in Australia-----</b>	<b>21</b>
Recommendations for Maintenance of Professional Competence-----	24
Recommendations for Accreditation and Membership Transition-----	27
Individual Compensation, Welfare and Wellbeing Advocates and Veteran Support Practitioners-----	27
Organisations-----	28
Affiliates-----	30
<b>The New Landscape of Veteran Support in Australia-----</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Concluding remarks-----</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>About the author - Jacqui Van de Velde-----</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Contact details:-----</b>	<b>33</b>





## Introduction

The Australian Government's commitment to ensuring that veterans and their families have access to high-quality support is commendable and necessary. The roles of veterans' advocates and veteran support practitioners are crucial in making this support accessible, informed, accurate, and timely. As outlined in the consultation paper, these advocates/veteran support practitioners provide essential services, ranging from lodging claims for compensation to welfare advocacy and supporting engagement with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and other service providers.

Currently, there are areas of the advocacy services which remain largely unregulated, resulting in variable quality and limited oversight of advocates' work standards and conduct. This submission supports the proposal to establish the Institute of Veterans' Advocates (the Institute) as a national professional association for veterans' advocates. It further recommends reconceptualising the scope of the Australian Institute of Veterans' Advocates to include military compensation advocates, welfare and wellbeing advocates, veteran support practitioners, and organisations that have veteran support services as a core business objective, as well as an "affiliate" status for adjunct service providers. By incorporating all practitioners within the veteran support sector, including institutions and ex-service organisations (ESOs) dedicated to supporting veterans and their families, the Institute will provide a more comprehensive framework.

This submission will address the criteria outlined in the consultation paper, including the development of professional standards, ongoing professional development, and the establishment of an independent industry body to oversee sector and service provision standards.

The establishment of the Institute is a timely and necessary initiative to enhance the quality, consistency and sustainability of veterans' advocacy and support services. The Institute will offer much-needed leadership, support, and oversight to the sector, ensuring that practitioners are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and ethical frameworks necessary to effectively support veterans and their families.

Advocacy, in its broader context, is the act of representing, supporting, and championing the rights and needs of individuals or groups to effect positive change and achieve equitable outcomes. It is more than navigating the claims process in a largely adversarial legislative environment. Beyond the realms of military and welfare compensation, advocacy encompasses a wide array of activities aimed at empowering veterans and their families. On a micro level, it involves personalised support, such as navigating complex systems, accessing healthcare, securing employment, and providing emotional and psychological assistance. On a macro level, advocacy extends to influencing public policy, enhancing community awareness, and fostering societal change to create environments that recognise and honour the contributions of veterans. Advocacy, therefore, is not only about addressing immediate needs but also about advocating



for systemic improvements that facilitate long-term wellbeing and integration of veterans and their families into society. Skills and expertise in both the micro and macro level are necessary, whether they are embodied in individual practitioners or made available across an organisation's service delivery team.

This submission has been written from the perspective of an industry training and assessment professional with extensive experience in the development and implementation of professional standards and evidence based compliance.

## An Independent Institute/ Industry Body Is Essential

The establishment of an independent institute, separate from both the government and ex-service organisations (ESOs), is important for several key reasons:

**Autonomy and Impartiality:** An independent Institute ensures autonomy and impartiality in its operations and decision-making. Removing direct government control allows the Institute to act in the best interests of veterans and their advocates/support practitioners without political influence. This autonomy will enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the Institute's work, ensuring its decisions are viewed as fair and unbiased.

**Conflict of Interest Avoidance:** By separating the Institute from both the government and ESOs, potential conflicts of interest are avoided. The Institute can act as an independent body, free from the influence of any single organisation or entity. This independence ensures that decisions regarding standards, accreditation, and complaints handling are made impartially and without favouritism.

**Representation of Diverse Interests:** The Institute aims to represent the diverse interests of all veterans' advocates, including those from different backgrounds and organisations. By being independent, the Institute can provide a unified voice for advocates, ensuring their interests are effectively represented and promoted. This includes advocating for resources, recognition, and support for the vital work they do.

**Standardisation and Consistency:** An independent Institute can set and maintain consistent professional standards across the sector. This standardisation ensures that all advocates, regardless of their affiliation, adhere to the same ethical framework and competency requirements. Consistency in standards improves the overall quality of advocacy services and protects the interests of veterans and their families.

**Accountability and Transparency:** Operating as a stand-alone entity, the Institute will be accountable for its actions and decisions. This accountability fosters transparency and ensures that the Institute operates with integrity. The Institute will be responsible for its governance,



financial management, and adherence to its established standards, enhancing trust in its operations.

**Responsive and Adaptable:** An independent Institute can be more responsive to the evolving needs of the veteran community and the advocacy sector. It can adapt its policies, standards, and training requirements to reflect changes in the veteran support landscape. This adaptability ensures that advocates remain equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively support veterans and their families.

**Collaboration and Partnership:** While independent, the Institute will foster collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders, including the government, ESOs, and other relevant organisations. This collaborative approach will enable information sharing, resource allocation, and the development of cohesive strategies to support veterans.

**Professional Recognition:** Establishing the Institute as a separate entity will enhance the professional recognition of veterans' advocates/support practitioners. It will elevate their standing in the community and reinforce the importance of their work. This recognition will also encourage more individuals to pursue advocacy as a career, strengthening the sector's capacity to support veterans.

**Specialised Focus:** The Institute, as a dedicated body, can focus solely on the needs of veterans' advocates/support practitioners. This specialised focus will ensure that the unique challenges and requirements of this sector are addressed effectively. The Institute can develop tailored standards, training programs, and support mechanisms specifically designed for advocates working with veterans.

**Complaints Handling and Oversight:** An independent Institute can establish a robust and impartial complaints handling process. This process will provide a mechanism for veterans and their families to raise concerns about the conduct or performance of advocates/support practitioners. The Institute, as a separate entity, can impartially investigate and address these complaints, enhancing accountability and protecting the interests of those using advocacy services.

The establishment of an independent institute is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness, integrity, and responsiveness of the advocacy/support sector. This separation from government and ESOs fosters autonomy, impartiality, and accountability, ultimately improving the support and services provided to veterans and their families.



## The Limitations of the Current ATDP Qualifications

1. Dependency on Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs): The ATDP requires trainees to be nominated by their sponsoring ESO and maintain affiliation throughout the course. If this affiliation ceases, the trainee cannot continue until a new nomination is made. This dependency can limit access to training for individuals who may not have continuous support from an ESO, potentially excluding capable advocates who could benefit the sector.
2. Rigid Structure and Prerequisites: The program has a structured pathway where advocates must progress through levels, starting from level 2 before advancing to higher levels. This rigid structure does not accommodate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of potential advocates, making it less adaptable to individual learning needs and potentially slowing down the process of becoming fully qualified. *The current ADTP training does not result in a full nationally recognised qualification.*
3. Limited Scope of Training: While the program is nationally accredited, it focuses specifically on the current military compensation legislation, which does not cover the broader range of skills and knowledge needed to address the evolving and diverse needs of veterans. The training does not fully prepare advocates for the complex and varied issues faced by contemporary veterans.

While the ATDP currently provides essential training for military advocacy, its current structure and requirements limit its effectiveness in meeting the diverse and evolving needs of the veteran community. The reliance on ESOs for nominations, the rigid progression through training levels, and the narrow focus of the curriculum are areas where the program could be improved to better serve its clients. With imminent legislation, the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024, with all new compensation claims from 1 July 2026 will be dealt with under a single piece of legislation – an improved Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA), and the opportunities afforded by the soon to be released Final Report from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, it is an ideal point in history to review the role and curriculum of the ADTP and potentially transition to a new structure under the proposed Institute.

## Lifting the Standard and Availability of Advocacy Services

The Institute will play a pivotal role in setting and maintaining professional standards for veterans' advocates/support practitioners. By developing and implementing competency standards, a Code of Ethics, and training requirements, and ongoing professional development with industry competency, the Institute will ensure that advocates/support workers possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality services.



The Certificate IV in Veteran Support Services, [11153NAT - Certificate IV in Veteran Support Services (insert stream)], developed by this submission's author, is a step towards standardising the skills and knowledge required by advocates and veteran support practitioners. This qualification recognises the unique needs of veterans and their families and aims to equip individuals with the ability to promote, facilitate, and support effective engagement with veteran support services. It includes enterprise units of competence such as "Assist and promote veterans, partners, and family engagement with veteran support services" and "Establish support network partnerships," which are crucial for effective advocacy.

Standardisation of qualifications, mapping qualifications from other relevant sectors, the development of a Code of Ethics and professional standards for practitioners and organisations operating in the sector, will ensure that veterans and their families can access consistent and ethical support across Australia. This will address the current variability in service quality and enhance the overall standard of advocacy/veteran support services.

## Investing in Excellence

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Commonwealth government play a critical role in ensuring that veterans and their families receive the highest quality of support and advocacy services. To achieve this, it is imperative that they invest in excellence and allocate sufficient budget and scholarships to increase the workforce supply of professional advocates/support practitioners. This investment is essential for several reasons:

1. **Addressing Workforce Shortages:** The demand for veteran support services continues to grow as more veterans seek assistance with compensation claims, welfare advocacy, and engagement with various service providers. Without an adequate supply of trained professionals, veterans may face delays and inconsistencies in receiving the support they need. By providing financial incentives such as scholarships, the government can attract more individuals to this vital profession, thereby expanding the workforce and ensuring timely and effective service delivery.
2. **Ensuring Compliance with Industry Standards:** The establishment of proposed industry standards aims to enhance the quality, consistency, and ethical frameworks within veteran support services. To comply with these standards, advocates and support workers must undergo rigorous training and professional development. Government funding will enable individuals to access the necessary education and resources, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet industry expectations and provide exemplary service to veterans and their families.
3. **Enhancing Professional Development:** Continuous professional development is crucial for maintaining high standards within the sector. Scholarships and funding can facilitate ongoing education and training opportunities, allowing advocates to stay updated with the latest practices and policies. This investment not only benefits the advocates but also significantly improves the quality of services rendered to veterans.





In addition to increasing the workforce supply, it is recommended that the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) undergo a comprehensive review to streamline its accreditation process. Currently, delays, lack of mentoring opportunities and inefficiencies in accreditation can hinder the timely availability of qualified professionals. By reviewing and optimising the ATDP, the government can ensure a more efficient and expedited pathway for individuals to become accredited advocates, thus reducing bottlenecks and enhancing service provision. Furthermore it is recommended that the ATDP system not be the only pathway for qualifying to become a practitioner in this sector. Rather ATDP should be the minimum standard and be the body for accreditation of professional development courses and events, allocating CPD hours or points at different membership levels so that practitioners can select and formulate their personalised professional development plans to maintain their accreditation by the Institute and map a pathway to higher levels of accreditation.

## Management and industry regulation of fee-based services - Fee vs Non-Fee Services

The Australian veteran advocacy sector faces a significant challenge in managing the conflict between fee-based advocacy services and "no fee" services. This issue arises from differing expectations and perceptions regarding the quality and accessibility of services offered to veterans.

Concerns about fee-charging veteran advocacy services that take a percentage of successful lump sum payouts as their fee centre around potential conflicts of interest and ethical considerations. Such services may prioritise their financial gain over the best interests of their clients. When an advocacy service's revenue model is tied to the size of the lump sum payout, there is a risk that advocates might unduly influence clients to pursue these payouts even when they might not be in the client's best long-term interest. For instance, a lump sum might compromise the client's ongoing financial security or benefits that could be more advantageous over time. This setup can lead to a fundamental conflict of interest, where the advocate's financial incentives do not align with the client's welfare. Additionally, this model raises ethical questions about transparency and informed consent, as clients may not fully understand how their advocate's compensation structure could impact the advice they receive. To safeguard clients, it is crucial to establish regulations and oversight mechanisms that ensure advocates operate with transparency, prioritise client interests, and provide unbiased recommendations that genuinely reflect the clients' best interests.



Following is a list of challenges to be addressed by the proposed Institute:

1. Equity and Accessibility:

Pay-for-advocacy services can create a barrier for veterans who may not have the financial resources to afford such assistance. This can lead to inequities in service provision, where only those who can pay receive potentially faster or more comprehensive support. On the other hand, "no fee" services aim to provide equitable access to all veterans, regardless of their financial situation. However, these services may be overwhelmed by demand, potentially leading to longer waiting times and limited availability.

2. Perceived Quality Differences:

Veterans might perceive fee-based services as superior due to the assumption that paying for a service equates to receiving higher quality or more personalised attention. This perception can undermine the trust and confidence in "no fee" services, even if they are equally competent. The challenge lies in ensuring that all veterans have access to high-quality advocacy, irrespective of their ability to pay.

3. Resource Allocation:

Organisations offering "no fee" services often rely on limited funding, which can strain resources and affect the quality and reach of their services. In contrast, fee-based services can reinvest their earnings into resources and staff development, potentially offering more robust services. Balancing resource allocation between the two models is a critical challenge that needs addressing to ensure fair service provision across the sector.

4. Ethical Considerations:

Charging fees for services that are fundamentally aimed at assisting veterans might raise ethical concerns. The core mission of veteran advocacy is to support and uplift individuals who have served the nation, and introducing a financial barrier could conflict with these values. Ensuring that fee-based services adhere to ethical guidelines and maintain transparency is crucial to managing this challenge.

5. Client Expectations:

Veterans might have varying expectations based on whether they are utilising pay-for-advocacy or "no fee" services. Those paying for services might expect expedited processes and more personalised attention, which can create a disparity in satisfaction levels between the two groups. Managing these expectations requires clear communication and a standardised approach to advocacy quality across both service models.

It is recommended that the industry establish a set of uniform standards and best practices applicable to both pay-for-advocacy and "no fee" services. This includes ensuring transparency in service offerings, maintaining ethical guidelines, and providing adequate funding to "no fee" services to improve their capacity and reach. Additionally, fostering collaboration between



different service providers can help balance resources and expertise, ultimately leading to a more cohesive and equitable support system for all veterans.

## The Case for Qualifications in Legal and Financial Advisory

Military compensation claims often involve complex legal and financial matters, and it is imperative that advocates working in this area possess a strong understanding of these domains. The level of qualification and expertise required for military compensation advocacy is comparable to that of a paralegal [Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 5 and 6]. This ensures that advocates have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively navigate the legal and administrative processes involved in military compensation claims.

Paralegals typically work under the supervision of lawyers and assist with legal research, document preparation, and client interaction. They need a solid grasp of legal principles, procedures, and ethics. Similarly, advocates supporting veterans with military compensation claims must understand the legal framework, entitlements, and processes specific to the veteran community. They assist veterans in understanding their rights, gathering evidence, and navigating the often complex claims process.

AQF level 5/6 qualifications equip individuals with specialised knowledge and skills applicable to a specific industry or field. In the context of military compensation advocacy, this level of qualification ensures that advocates have the expertise needed to effectively support veterans and their families. It provides them with an understanding of the unique challenges and complexities faced by veterans when pursuing compensation claims.

Additionally, military compensation claims often involve financial considerations, such as calculating loss of earnings, future economic loss, determining appropriate compensation amounts, “offsetting” of entitlements between various compensation or superannuation schemes, employment income, and means testing for other Commonwealth payments. This is where the inclusion of financial advisory qualifications or independent financial advisory services becomes crucial. Advocates should possess a working knowledge of financial matters to guide veterans effectively. They need to understand the financial implications of different compensation options and be able to explain these implications to veterans and their families.

By requiring advocates in the area of military compensation to have qualifications equivalent to a paralegal at AQF level 5/6 and additional qualifications or access to independent financial advisory services, we can ensure that veterans receive informed and competent support. This proposed qualification level ensures that advocates have the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the legal and financial complexities of military compensation claims, ultimately improving the quality of support provided to veterans and their families.



## The Case for Qualifications and Navigating Medical Support/Patient Advocacy

It is a recommendation of this submission that advocates/support practitioners should possess qualifications and training in navigating medical support and patient advocacy to ensure that veterans are directed to holistic, informed, and appropriate care. Such training is crucial given the complexities of the healthcare system and the unique challenges faced by veterans, who often require specialised medical and psychological support due to their service experiences.

Currently, a significant challenge in advocacy practice arises when military compensation advocates direct clients to medical assessments based on the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) Statements of Principles. These principles are designed to streamline the process of linking medical conditions to service-related factors, thus facilitating compensation claims. However, this framework often tends to lead advocates to prioritise the procedural aspects of compensation over the individualised health needs of veterans.

Without comprehensive training, advocates may focus predominantly on meeting the criteria determined by the RMA, potentially leading clients to pursue specific diagnoses that align with compensation requirements rather than those that best reflect their actual health conditions. This approach can result in adverse health outcomes such as misdiagnosis, overtreatment, or inappropriate medicalisation, not only failing to address the veterans' true health needs but may also exacerbate existing conditions or create new ones.

Furthermore, veterans might be directed towards unnecessary or unsuitable treatments, driven more by the necessity to qualify for compensation rather than genuine medical advice. This misalignment can have serious, long-term implications for the veterans' overall wellbeing, potentially leading to ineffective or harmful interventions.

Training in navigating medical support and patient advocacy would equip practitioners with the skills to critically evaluate medical advice, advocate for patient-centred care, and navigate the healthcare system effectively. Practitioners would be better prepared to guide veterans through their healthcare pathways, ensuring that medical assessments and treatments are genuinely in the clients' best interests. This training would empower practitioners to challenge medical recommendations that may not serve the veterans' health needs and to collaborate with healthcare professionals to develop comprehensive, individualised care plans.

Professional patient advocacy is a relatively new and emerging field in Australia. An advocate with skills in navigating medical support and patient advocacy would be health literate, and know how to navigate the healthcare system. They would understand medical terminology and have the training to relay it in terms accessible to the patient.

Currently in Australia, there is no specific training in navigating medical support and patient advocacy. There is the CHCSS00069 - Advocacy Skill Set. A new, specific skills set would need



to be developed and/or links to established patient advocates facilitated to fill the needs gap in this area. A starting point for qualification in this skill set would be to review the existing Patient Advocacy certifications delivered in the USA through UCLA, The Cleveland State University, and the University of Miami.

In summary, equipping practitioners with qualifications and training in navigating medical support and patient advocacy is essential. It ensures that the focus remains on the veterans' overall health and well-being, rather than solely on meeting compensation criteria, thus fostering a more ethical, effective, and compassionate approach to veteran care.

## The Case for Qualifications and Skills in Understanding the Broader Legislative Environment of Veteran Advocacy and Support.

Advocates and veteran support practitioners in Australia must receive training in the broader legislative environment beyond military compensation legislation to effectively support veterans navigating the complex web of laws and regulations that impact their lives. This training is essential because veterans' needs often intersect with various legal frameworks at both the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels, which extend beyond the scope of military compensation.

### Understanding the Broader Legislative Environment

The legislative framework governing veterans' affairs in Australia is multifaceted. While military body of compensation legislation is central to veterans' compensation and rehabilitation, they are not the only relevant laws. Veterans may also require assistance with issues related to healthcare, housing, employment, and education, all of which are governed by additional Commonwealth and State/Territory legislation.

### Commonwealth and State/Territory Jurisdictions

At the Commonwealth level, veterans may interact with laws related to superannuation and taxation, which can significantly impact their financial wellbeing. Understanding these laws is crucial for ensuring veterans receive proper financial advice and support. Additionally, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) may be relevant for veterans with disabilities, requiring advocates to navigate complex eligibility and service provision criteria.

Family law is another critical area, as veterans may face unique family-related legal challenges due to their service, necessitating a thorough understanding of both Commonwealth and State family law regulations. Aged care law is also increasingly important as the veteran population ages, requiring advocates to be well versed in the rights and services available under both Commonwealth and State aged care legislation.



The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) is a critical piece of Commonwealth legislation in Australia that aims to eliminate discrimination against individuals on the basis of disability in various areas of public life, including employment, education, access to premises, and the provision of goods and services. For advocates and veteran support practitioners, having a working knowledge of the DDA is essential because it empowers them to effectively protect and promote the rights of veterans with disabilities. Understanding the nuances of this legislation enables advocates to identify instances of discrimination and take appropriate action to address them, ensuring that veterans receive equitable treatment and access to opportunities without bias. Moreover, this knowledge allows advocates to guide veterans in navigating complaints processes, liaising with employers or service providers, and fostering environments that respect and accommodate the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. By being well-versed in the DDA, advocates can play a pivotal role in advancing the inclusion and participation of veterans in all aspects of society.

State and Territory jurisdictions also play a crucial role, particularly in areas such as healthcare delivery, housing, and local community services. Each State and Territory has its own set of laws and regulations that can affect veterans' access to services and support.

Without comprehensive training in these broader legislative areas, advocates may inadvertently focus too narrowly on military compensation, potentially overlooking other critical aspects of veterans' needs. This narrow focus can lead to gaps in support, where veterans might not receive the full range of services and protections available to them under the law. For instance, without understanding superannuation and taxation laws, advocates might miss opportunities to optimise veterans' financial outcomes or fail to navigate the complexities of the NDIS, family law, or aged care systems effectively.

Training in the broader Australian legislative environment equips advocates and veteran support practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide comprehensive support and/or be in an informed position to refer their veteran client on to a professional with the specific qualifications and experience for advice and direction. By understanding the interplay between Commonwealth and State/Territory laws, advocates can better navigate the legal landscape, ensuring that veterans receive the full spectrum of benefits and services they are entitled to. This holistic approach not only enhances the quality of advocacy but also promotes the wellbeing and effective transition from service.

## Providing Access to Training and Professional Development

The Institute will also address the need for ongoing professional development and training for advocates. By providing access to training activities, including courses in military compensation advocacy, the unique nature of military service, and veterans' entitlements, the Institute will ensure that advocates remain up-to-date with the latest knowledge and skills.





Additionally, the Institute's proposed functions include contributing to advocate training and providing advice on the design and delivery of Advocate Training and Development Program (ATDP) courses, and ASQA accredited AQF certificates and diplomas. This will ensure that training programs remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the veteran community.

## Establishing a Complaints Handling Process

One of the critical roles of the Institute will be to establish a nationally consistent complaints handling process. This process will provide a mechanism for addressing concerns raised by veterans and their families about the performance or conduct of advocates. The Institute will monitor members' compliance with established standards and requirements and administer a complaints and feedback process, enhancing accountability and protecting the interests of those utilising advocacy services.

## Professionalising Veteran Advocacy Services

The establishment of the Institute will professionalise veteran advocacy services and enhance their standing and recognition in the community. This is a significant step towards ensuring that the vital work of advocates is acknowledged and respected. By setting rigorous standards and providing ongoing professional development, the Institute will elevate the perception and impact of veteran advocacy services.

## Governance and Membership of the Institute

### Governance Structure

The proposed governance structure for the Institute, as a stand-alone entity with an independent Board of Directors, is well-conceived and ensures a diverse range of perspectives. The inclusion of an ESO representative, an advocate representative, an Australian Defence Force/serving member representative, a families representative, and DVA and Department of Defence ex-officio members will bring valuable insights and expertise to the Board. It is recommended that practitioners from related sectors are also included, for example, legal practitioners, social and community services practitioners. Once established the Board of Directors should also include representation from the Institute's membership.

It is recommended that the recruitment of the Board of Directors for the Institute should prioritise a skills and expertise-based selection process rather than merely focusing on representational appointments. This approach should align with the strategic priorities of the Board to effectively coordinate and develop the veteran support sector towards a best practice, robust standard. By selecting directors who possess relevant skills, knowledge, and experience, the Institute can



ensure strong leadership and informed decision-making, ultimately fostering innovation and excellence in veteran support services.

## Membership Streams - expanding the context and coverage

It is recommended that the proposed two streams (claims and welfare) be expanded to incorporate a more holistic approach to better serve veterans and their families. This expansion should include veteran support workers who do not specifically work within the traditional categories of claims and welfare, veteran support practitioners, practitioners from related sectors with a focus on veterans and their families, and organisations with veteran support as a core business objective. By broadening the scope of these streams, the Institute can ensure a more comprehensive and integrated support network that addresses the diverse needs of veterans and their families, promoting a more cohesive and effective service delivery model.

Regarding the proposed membership structure, It is recommended that the following membership categories—Associate, Member, Fellow, and Corporate—be developed to emphasise skills and experience, professional recognition, ongoing engagement with professional development, and the promotion of industry excellence. Additionally it is recommended that the categories require demonstrated increments in professional abilities, skills and leadership; collection of evidence against the professional standards, audited maintenance of the skills, not years of service and payment of fees. By integrating these elements, the membership structure will not only recognise individuals' and organisations' current achievements but also encourage continuous growth and leadership within the sector. This approach will help cultivate a practice community committed to advancing best practices and elevating standards across the industry. A recommendation would be to change the term “corporate” to “organisational” as not all entities that operate in this sector and would potentially be included in the Institute’s coverage would identify as corporate or for profit.

The membership eligibility requirements, founded on the completion of relevant ATDP courses or recognition of equivalent professional qualifications for welfare advocates, ensure that members possess the necessary skills and knowledge. The inclusion of claims advocates and fee-for-service advocates in the membership structure is particularly important, as it will help standardise the quality of services provided by these advocates, who may currently operate outside the scope of ESOs and existing training programs.

The proposed cost structure, with membership fees encompassing access to the Institute's professional indemnity scheme, is reasonable and should encourage the target group to join the Institute. The option for members who are already subject to professional indemnity arrangements through their paid employment to opt-out is also sensible and flexible providing there is documentation of the equivalent cover and indemnity is afforded.





It is recommended that the proposed Institute consider an “Affiliate membership” designed for professionals who are already qualified and recognised by another industry body or institute in their specific area of practice and are seeking additional recognition with the proposed Institute due to their work with veterans and their families as a part of their regular workflow and client load. To obtain and maintain this affiliation, these professionals would need to demonstrate ongoing good standing within their main industry profession, ensuring they adhere to the standards and ethics of their respective fields. Additionally, they must engage in continuous professional development relevant to the veterans support sector, highlighting their commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of this group. Affiliate membership would serve as a mark of trust and competence, signalling to potential veteran clients that these professionals meet the Institute's standards. This recognition would provide clients with a degree of confidence in the level of service and care they can expect, ensuring that their needs are managed with expertise and sensitivity from a veteran-centric perspective.

## A Starting Point for Developing Membership Categories

### Professional Standards for Australian Military and Veteran Support Practitioners by Membership Level

#### 1. Associate Level

- **Eligibility and Role:** This entry-level membership is for individuals new to the field or those who are gaining initial experience in military and veteran support services. Associates are typically in the early stages of their careers and may be pursuing relevant qualifications.
- **Professional Development:** Associates are encouraged to engage in foundational training programs and workshops to build their knowledge and skills in veteran support services.
- **Supervision and Guidance:** Work under the supervision of more experienced members to ensure adherence to ethical standards and effective service delivery.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Participate in networking events to connect with peers and mentors, fostering professional growth and development .

#### 2. Member Level

- **Eligibility and Role:** Members are practitioners who have gained a moderate level of experience and have demonstrated competence in providing support to veterans. They are actively involved in delivering services and advocating for veterans' rights.
- **Commitment to Standards:** Members must adhere to the established ethical and professional standards, ensuring high-quality service delivery.
- **Continuous Learning:** Engage in ongoing professional development to stay informed about the latest trends and policies affecting veterans.



- Collaboration: Actively collaborate with other service providers and participate in professional associations to enhance service delivery and advocacy efforts .

### 3. Fellow Level

- Eligibility and Role: Fellows are recognized for their significant contributions to the field of military and veteran support. They have extensive experience and have demonstrated leadership and innovation in their practice.
- Leadership and Mentorship: Fellows are expected to take on leadership roles within the professional community, mentoring junior members and contributing to the development of best practices.
- Advocacy and Policy Influence: Engage in high-level advocacy efforts and contribute to policy discussions to improve veteran services and support systems.
- Recognition: This level is often awarded based on peer nomination and approval by a governing board, acknowledging the Fellow's impact and dedication to the field .

### 4. Organisation Level

- Eligibility and Role: Organisation membership is designed for organisations and businesses that provide services or support to veterans. These entities play a crucial role in the broader ecosystem of veteran support.
- Commitment to Standards: Organisations must adhere to the same ethical and professional standards as individual members, ensuring their services align with the best interests of veterans. They engage or employ practitioners who are members of the Institute and maintain their professional competence as practitioners.
- Resource Provision and Support: Provide resources, training, and support to individual members, enhancing the overall capacity of the professional community.
- Partnership and Collaboration: Engage in partnerships with other organisations and stakeholders to deliver comprehensive support services to veterans .

### 5. Affiliate Level

- Eligibility and Role: Affiliate membership is designed for professionals who are already qualified and recognised by another industry body or institute in their specific area of practice. These professionals seek additional recognition with the proposed Institute due to their work with veterans and their families as part of their regular workflow and client load. This membership acknowledges their expertise and commitment to integrating veteran support into their professional practice.
- Commitment to Standards: Affiliates must demonstrate ongoing good standing within their primary industry profession, ensuring adherence to the standards and ethics of their respective fields. This commitment ensures that their services align with both their primary professional standards and the values of the proposed Institute, prioritising the best interests of veterans.



- **Continuous Learning:** Affiliates are required to engage in continuous professional development relevant to the veteran support sector. This involves participating in training, workshops, and other educational opportunities that enhance their understanding of the unique needs of veterans. Continuous learning ensures that affiliates remain informed and capable of providing high-quality, veteran-centric services
- **Collaboration:** Affiliates are encouraged to actively collaborate with other organisations and stakeholders within the veteran support community. This collaboration can include partnerships, joint initiatives, and participation in forums or networks that aim to improve the support and services available to veterans. By working together, affiliates can leverage their expertise and resources to deliver comprehensive and effective support to veterans and their families.

These membership levels are designed to recognise the varying degrees of experience and contribution within the field of military and veteran support, ensuring that all practitioners and organisations are equipped to provide the highest standard of care and advocacy for veterans.

It is recommended that the proposed Institute be established as a national body, ensuring a unified and cohesive approach to its functions, membership, and Board membership. This national framework should resist any attempts to federalise along State or Territory lines. By maintaining a national scope, the Institute can uphold consistent standards and practices across the country, fostering a more integrated and effective support system for veterans and their families. A national body will also enhance the Institute's ability to advocate for policy changes and improvements on a broader scale, ensuring that all veterans, regardless of their location, receive equitable access to high-quality services and support. This approach aligns with the principles of national institutions, which emphasise broad mandates and pluralistic membership to effectively promote and protect rights and interests

## Functions and Benefits of the Institute

The proposed functions of the Institute are comprehensive and necessary for ensuring the quality and consistency of veteran services. The Institute will play a crucial role in establishing and administering competency standards, a Code of Ethics, and training requirements. Additionally, the Institute will accredit and register service providers, monitor service delivery, and contribute to ongoing professional development.

## Accrediting and Registering Service Providers

One of the key functions of the Institute will be to accredit and register veteran service providers. This process will ensure that providers meet the established competency standards and adhere to the Code of Ethics and training requirements. The Institute will maintain a publicly accessible register of accredited practitioners providing veterans and their families with assurance and confidence in the services they access.



## Monitoring Service Delivery and Addressing Complaints

The Institute will play a vital role in monitoring the service delivery of accredited practitioners and addressing any complaints or concerns raised about their performance or behaviour. This includes administering a complaints and feedback process and, when necessary, referring complaints to other professional bodies for further action. This function will help maintain the integrity of the profession and protect the interests of veterans and their families.

## Contributing to Practitioner Training and Professional Development

The Institute's contribution to practitioner training and professional development is essential for ensuring a skilled and knowledgeable veteran support sector. By providing access to training activities and professional development opportunities, the Institute will enable practitioners to enhance their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in veteran support.

The proposed function of providing advice on the design and delivery of ATDP programs is also significant. It is recommended that the Institute also position itself to provide advice and consultation on emerging veteran support sector accredited training and qualifications. This will ensure that training programs remain relevant, responsive to the needs of the sector, and aligned with the Institute's established standards.

## Facilitating Professional Indemnity Insurance

The facilitation of professional indemnity insurance for Institute members is a valuable benefit that will provide practitioners with the necessary protection to carry out their work. Replacing the current Veterans Indemnity and Training Association (VITA), the Institute will ensure that advocates have access to appropriate professional indemnity arrangements.

## Workforce Planning

The establishment of the Institute is crucial to addressing the workforce challenges facing the veterans support sector. To effectively negotiate with the government on these issues, the Institute must be sufficiently resourced. This necessity is underscored by two significant factors: the historical and current reliance on an ageing volunteer advocate pool and the limited funding available to Ex-Service Organizations (ESOs) for hiring paid advocates.

**Reliance on an Ageing Volunteer Advocate Pool:** Historically, the veterans support sector has heavily depended on part-time volunteer advocates, many of whom are veterans themselves. These volunteers have dedicated countless hours to assisting fellow veterans in navigating complex bureaucratic systems to access essential services and benefits. However, this model is becoming increasingly unsustainable as the volunteer pool ages. Many long-serving volunteers are reaching retirement, leading to a decline in the number of available advocates. This ageing demographic not only reduces the workforce but also risks losing valuable knowledge and



experience that these volunteers possess. The Institute of Veterans Advocates, therefore, needs to be well-resourced to develop strategies that attract and train a new generation of advocates.

**Finite and Limited Funding for Employed Advocates:** ESOs play a pivotal role in providing advocacy services, often operating with limited financial resources, made up of small government grants that barely offset the cost of the work they undertake in this vital service provision and open competition for charitable donations and philanthropic partnerships. By being sufficiently resourced, the Institute of Veterans Advocates can work towards securing additional funding and resources for ESOs. This could involve negotiating with the government to increase funding allocations or to implement policies that channel more resources into the sector. The Institute can also explore innovative funding models and partnerships with private and public sectors to expand the financial base for ESOs.

## Professional Standards for Veteran Support and Advocacy in Australia

### *A Starting Point*

#### 1. Ethical and Professional Conduct

- **Integrity and Honesty:** Practitioners and organisations must maintain the highest levels of integrity and honesty in their interactions with veterans and their families, ensuring transparency and trustworthiness.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Safeguard the privacy of veterans by maintaining strict confidentiality of personal and sensitive information, only disclosing details with the veteran's consent or when legally required.
- **Respect and Dignity:** Treat all veterans and their families with respect and dignity, acknowledging their unique experiences and contributions.
- **Safeguarding:** Practitioners and organisations must maintain the relevant working with children checks and training for their jurisdictions of operation, and maintain safeguarding practices while working with this potentially vulnerable population.

#### 2. Knowledge and Skills

- **Competence:** Maintain a high level of competence by staying informed about the latest developments, policies, and practices in veteran support.
- **Specialised Expertise:** Develop and apply specialised knowledge relevant to specific roles, such as compensation, welfare, financial advice, and health advocacy, ensuring services are evidence-based and effective.
- **Veteran-Centred Practice:** Understand the unique needs and challenges faced by veterans and their families. Stay informed about current issues and trends in veteran support services.



- Communication and Interpersonal Skills: Build trusting and respectful relationships with veterans and effectively communicate complex information.

### 3. Advocacy and Representation

- Veteran Advocacy: Actively advocate for the rights and needs of veterans and their families, ensuring their voices are heard in policy-making and service delivery.
- Fair Representation: Provide fair and accurate representation of veterans' cases, using all available resources to achieve the best outcomes.
- Cultural Competence: Understand the cultural and social diversity of the veteran community. Respect and respond appropriately to the cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs of the veterans clients and their families.
- Collaboration and Referral: Collaborate effectively with other professionals and organisations to provide holistic support. Know when to refer veterans to specialised services and facilitate smooth transitions

### 4. Support and Wellbeing

- Holistic Approach: Adopt a holistic approach to support that considers the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of veterans. Provide information, resources, and referrals to promote overall wellbeing.
- Empowerment: Empower veterans by providing them with the information and resources they need to make informed decisions about their care and support.
- Solution-Focused and Trauma-Informed Practice: Understand and apply a Solution focused approach to all aspects of veteran and family support. Understand the impact of trauma and employ trauma-informed approaches as needed. Primarily enter into the practitioner - client relationship by focusing on veterans' strengths and resources, identify their goals, and develop strategies for positive outcomes. Guide veterans to recognise and build upon their existing capabilities.

### 5. Professional Development and Reflection

- Continuous Learning: Engage in continuous professional development to enhance skills and knowledge, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services.
- Reflective Practice: Regularly reflect on practice to identify areas for improvement and implement changes to enhance service delivery.
- Prioritise self-care to maintain practitioner wellbeing and prevent burnout.
- Supervision and Mentoring: Seek supervision or mentoring from experienced colleagues to enhance your skills. Providing supervision or mentoring to less experienced colleagues to contribute to the profession.

### 6. Industry Collaboration and Professional Networking

- Sector Best Practice: Engage with professional networks and communities of practice to stay informed about best practices and emerging trends in veteran support. Collaborate with colleagues to enhance the quality of veteran support services.



- Knowledge Sharing and Mentoring: Participate in knowledge-sharing initiatives, such as conferences, workshops, and online communities. Share expertise and learn from others. Mentor less experienced colleagues to build the capacity and capability of the veteran support sector.
- Interprofessional Collaboration: Collaborate with professionals from other disciplines, such as mental and physical healthcare, legal and social services, to provide holistic support. Advocate for a team-based approach to veteran support and actively contribute to interprofessional partnerships.
- Advocacy and Systems Change: Advocate for systemic changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of veteran support services. Collaborate with industry stakeholders, government bodies, and policymakers to influence policies, programs, and funding decisions impacting veterans.
- Community Engagement: Build and maintain relationships with community organisations, veterans' groups, and local initiatives that support veterans. Participate in community events and activities that promote the wellbeing, transition of veterans into civilian life and improved mental and physical health outcomes for veterans and their families.

## 7. Organisation Specific Standard

This standard apply to organisations that provide veteran advocacy and support as a core function:

- Ethical Framework: Organisations will have an ethical framework that guides their practices and ensures integrity, confidentiality, and veteran-centred approaches.
- Governance and Management: Effective governance and management practices should be in place to ensure the organisation's sustainability and accountability.
- Sector Collaboration: Evidence of consistent collaboration with other organisations within the sector to further the health and wellbeing outcomes of veterans and their families, in the areas of service provision, sharing facilities and infrastructure, research and development, service tenders and grant applications.
- Contribute to Professional Outcomes in the Sector: Evidence of engagement with other sector providers, the Institute, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defence and other Government agencies as necessary for consultations and furthering the wellbeing and outcomes for veterans and their families.
- Quality Assurance: Implement quality assurance processes to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of veteran support services.
- Staff Competency: Ensure that staff members providing veteran support possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attributes outlined in these standards and have the required membership and accreditation as an individual practitioner in the sector.





- Safeguarding: Organisations will have and maintain safeguarding policies and procedures for all employees, volunteers, contractors, and third parties across all programs and services it delivers in this sector.
- Continuous Improvement: Commit to continuous improvement by regularly reviewing and enhancing the organisation's veteran support practices, policies, and procedures.

Comprehensive professional standards aim to ensure that veterans in Australia receive high-quality, ethical, and effective support and advocacy services. By adhering to these standards, military compensation advocates, welfare/wellbeing advocates, veteran support practitioners, and dedicated organisations can provide the best possible assistance to those who have served their country.

## Recommendations for Maintenance of Professional Competence

The process of maintaining professional competence should be embraced as a supportive journey of professional development and growth. Its design should foster best practices, encourage reflective and solution-focused thinking, and build both capability and competence. This process is not about punitive compliance but rather about empowering practitioners to enhance their skills and knowledge continually. By engaging in ongoing professional development, individuals contribute to a culture of excellence and innovation, ensuring they provide the highest quality support and advocacy for veterans. This approach nurtures a collaborative and dynamic professional environment where learning and improvement are celebrated, ultimately benefiting both practitioners and the communities they serve.

It is recommended that the Institute implement a supportive system to assist members at risk of not meeting professional competence requirements. This system should include a structured support program, offering personalised guidance and resources, with a reasonable period—typically six months—allocated for members to achieve compliance. This approach focuses on fostering professional development and capability building rather than imposing punitive measures.

In addition, the Institute must maintain the integrity and reputation of the profession by reserving the right to revoke membership accreditation in cases of gross misconduct, actions that bring the profession into disrepute, or criminal convictions that prevent a practitioner from fulfilling the inherent requirements of their role. This includes compliance with State or Territory laws in Australia that prohibit individuals with specific criminal records from certain types of employment, such as working with children. The Institute should also align with the standards set by professional and occupational licensing bodies, which consider the relevance of a person's criminal record to their particular field.





By implementing these recommendations, the Institute can ensure that it supports its members effectively while upholding the highest ethical and professional standards, thereby ensuring the delivery of trusted and high-quality services to veterans and their families.

To ensure members of the Institute maintain professional competence and adhere to the established standards, a comprehensive evidence guide is necessary. This sample guide outlines the types of evidence that members at each level—Associate, Member, Fellow, Organisation, and Affiliate—can provide to demonstrate their commitment to continuous professional development (CPD).

All members should be required to maintain a comprehensive professional accreditation portfolio that evidences their ongoing competence in alignment with the established standards. This portfolio should include documentation of continuous professional development activities, reflections on practice, participation in industry collaborations, and adherence to ethical and professional conduct guidelines. By systematically compiling this evidence, members demonstrate their commitment to excellence and accountability in providing high-quality support and advocacy for veterans and their families.

### 1. Associate Level

- Training Certificates: Evidence of completion of foundational training programs and workshops.
- CPD Log: A detailed log of CPD activities, including dates, providers, and learning outcomes.
- Supervisor Feedback: Written feedback or evaluations from supervisors or mentors, highlighting progress and areas of growth.
- Participation Records: Records of attendance at networking events, seminars, or introductory conferences.

### 2. Member Level

- Advanced Training Certifications: Certificates from advanced training sessions, courses, or specialised workshops.
- CPD Log: A comprehensive log of CPD activities with reflections on how the learning has been applied in practice.
- Peer Reviews: Documentation of peer reviews or feedback sessions, demonstrating engagement with other professionals.
- Case Studies: Written case studies or reports that illustrate the application of knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios.

### 3. Fellow Level

- Leadership and Mentorship Documentation: Evidence of participation in mentoring programs, either as a mentor or a mentee, including feedback from mentees.



- Policy Advocacy Contributions: Documentation of involvement in policy discussions, such as position papers, meeting minutes, or advocacy campaign materials.
- Conference Presentations: Copies of presentations or papers presented at conferences, seminars, or workshops.
- CPD Log: A detailed log reflecting a minimum of 40 hours of professional development, emphasising leadership and policy advocacy.

#### 4. Organisation Level

- Staff Training and Development Records: Documentation of organisational training programs and CPD activities for staff members.
- Partnership Agreements: Evidence of partnerships or collaborations with other veteran support organisations or stakeholders.
- Impact Reports: Reports demonstrating the impact of corporate initiatives on veteran support services, including feedback from beneficiaries.
- CPD Summary: A summary of collective CPD activities undertaken by the organisation, aligning with corporate goals and veteran support standards.

#### 5. Affiliate Level

- Advocacy and Awareness Initiatives: Documentation of advocacy campaigns or awareness programs supported or initiated by the affiliate.
- Networking and Collaboration Records: Evidence of participation in networking events, partnerships, or collaborations with veteran support organisations.
- Feedback and Testimonials: Testimonials or feedback from organisations or individuals benefiting from the affiliate's support or advocacy efforts.
- CPD Log: A record of at least 10 hours of CPD activities, focusing on advocacy, awareness, and networking.

#### Submission and Review Process

- Annual Submission: Members at all levels are required to submit their evidence annually or as determined by the accreditation period to the governing body responsible for overseeing professional competence.
- Review and Feedback: The submitted evidence will be reviewed, and feedback will be provided to ensure compliance with standards and identify areas for further development.
- Certification: Upon successful review, members will receive certification of competence for the accreditation period, with recognition for outstanding contributions where applicable and information about pathways to higher levels of membership where applicable.



This evidence guide is designed to ensure that all members actively engage in maintaining their professional competence, thereby enhancing the quality and effectiveness of support provided to Australian veterans and their families.

## Recommendations for Accreditation and Membership Transition

The Consultation paper refers to the proposed membership criteria:

*'Four membership categories would be available:*

- Associate (i.e. trainees, support officers)*
- Member (i.e. ATDP level 2-3 advocates, or those with equivalent experience or professional qualification)*
- Fellow (i.e. ATDP level 4 advocates, or those with equivalent experience or professional qualification), and*
- Corporate'*

It is recommended that these be viewed as interim criteria and the accreditation system move forward in a transition scheme as outlined here.

### Individual Compensation, Welfare and Wellbeing Advocates and Veteran Support Practitioners

#### 1. Interim Accreditation for Existing Practitioners

- Recognition of Current Qualifications and Experience: Existing practitioners can receive interim accreditation by demonstrating their current qualifications and experience in their respective fields. This process involves submitting documentation of their professional credentials and a portfolio of work that highlights their experience with veteran support.
- Streamlined Application Process: Implement a streamlined application process that recognises existing industry accreditations and certifications, allowing practitioners to transition smoothly into the new system without redundant assessments.
- Provisional Membership: Offer provisional membership status to practitioners who meet the interim criteria, granting them access to resources and networks while they complete any additional requirements for full accreditation.

#### 2. Application of New Standards

- Target group: The new standards will apply to all new entrants to the field of veteran support, as well as existing practitioners seeking full accreditation beyond the interim period.



- Implementation Timeline: Set a clear timeline for when the new standards will take effect, allowing current practitioners adequate time to transition and meet any additional requirements.
- Exemptions and Adaptations: Consider exemptions or adaptations for practitioners with extensive experience or those nearing retirement, ensuring the standards are inclusive and fair and maintain client service.

### 3. Transition from Interim to Full Accreditation

- Completion of Additional Requirements: Practitioners with interim accreditation must complete any additional training or assessments required by the new standards within a specified timeframe.
- Mentorship and Support: Provide mentorship and support programs to assist practitioners in meeting the new standards, fostering a collaborative and supportive transition process.
- Evaluation and Feedback: Conduct evaluations to ensure practitioners meet the new standards, offering feedback and guidance for those who need further development.

### 4. Accreditation Periods and Maintenance of Professional Competence

- Accreditation Periods: Implement a five-year accreditation cycle, during which practitioners must demonstrate ongoing professional competence and adherence to standards.
- Annual CPD Requirements: Require practitioners to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) annually, documenting their activities and learning outcomes to maintain their accreditation.
- Comprehensive Review Every Five Years: Conduct a comprehensive review every five years to assess practitioners' overall competence and compliance with standards, ensuring they remain current and effective in their roles.

## Organisations

To effectively transition organisations, including Ex-Service Organizations (ESOs), into the Institute membership structure, a phased approach should be adopted. This approach will ensure a seamless integration while maintaining operational continuity and aligning with the Institute's standards and objectives. Recommended Transition Plan for organisations:

#### 1. Initial Assessment and Planning (0-3 Months)

- Assessment of Current Status: Conduct an initial assessment of the organisation's existing structure, qualifications, and practices to identify alignment with the Institute's standards.
- Customised Transition Plan: Develop a tailored transition plan for each organisation, outlining specific requirements, timelines, and support mechanisms.



- Stakeholder Engagement: Initiate communication with key stakeholders within the organisation to ensure understanding and buy-in for the transition process.
- 2. Alignment and Capacity Building (4-6 Months)
  - Training and Development: Provide training sessions and resources to align the organisation's practices with the Institute's standards, focusing on areas such as ethical conduct, advocacy, and professional development.
  - Resource Allocation: Identify and allocate resources necessary for transition, including personnel, technology, and financial support.
  - Pilot Programs: Implement pilot programs to test and refine new processes and practices, ensuring they meet the Institute's requirements.
- 3. Implementation and Integration (7-12 Months)
  - Full Integration: Gradually integrate the organisation into the Institute's membership structure, ensuring compliance with all standards and protocols.
  - Ongoing Support and Monitoring: Provide ongoing support and monitoring to address any challenges and ensure a smooth transition.
  - Feedback and Adjustment: Collect feedback from the organisation to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to the transition plan.
- 4. Review and Certification (12-15 Months)
  - Final Review: Conduct a comprehensive review of the organisation's compliance with the Institute's standards.
  - Certification of Membership: Upon successful completion of the transition, grant full membership status and certification, recognizing the organisation's commitment to excellence and veteran support.

#### Timelines and Milestones

- 0-3 Months: Initial assessment, planning, and stakeholder engagement completed.
- 4-6 Months: Training and pilot programs implemented, with initial alignment achieved.
- 7-12 Months: Full integration into the membership structure and ongoing support provided.
- 12-15 Months: Final review and certification, marking the successful transition.

By adopting a structured and phased approach, organisations, including ESOs, can transition into the Institute's membership structure effectively. This method ensures alignment with the Institute's standards while providing the necessary support and resources to facilitate the process. The proposed timelines and milestones offer a clear framework for achieving successful integration and maintaining the quality of services provided to veterans and their families.



## Affiliates

The proposed Institute should facilitate a smooth transition for professionals seeking "Affiliate Membership" by recognising their existing qualifications and experience while emphasising their commitment to veteran support. This process should be designed to acknowledge the professionals' standing within their primary industry while integrating them into the Institute's standards, thereby enhancing their credibility and effectiveness in serving veterans and their families. A recommended Transition Plan follows:

### 1. Eligibility Verification

- Recognition of Current Qualifications: Require professionals to submit proof of their qualifications and recognition by an existing industry body or institute. This documentation should confirm their good standing and adherence to the standards and ethics of their primary profession.
- Veteran Support Experience: Applicants should provide evidence of their experience working with veterans and their families as part of their regular client load, demonstrating their commitment to this group.

### 2. Application Process

- Streamlined Application: Develop a streamlined application process that allows professionals to efficiently apply for affiliate membership, leveraging their existing credentials.
- Supporting Documentation: Request documentation of their continuous professional development in the veteran support sector, highlighting any training, workshops, or certifications relevant to understanding and addressing veterans' needs.

### 3. Integration and Support

- Orientation Program: Offer an orientation program to familiarise new affiliates with the Institute's standards and expectations, focusing on veteran-centric practices and ethical guidelines.
- Mentorship and Networking: Provide access to mentorship opportunities and professional networks within the Institute to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative growth.

### 4. Continuous Professional Development

- CPD Requirements: Establish clear requirements for ongoing professional development specifically related to veteran support, ensuring affiliates remain informed about the latest practices and issues affecting veterans.
- Monitoring and Feedback: Implement a system for regular monitoring and feedback to ensure affiliates maintain their professional competence and commitment to the Institute's standards.



## 5. Recognition and Benefits

- Mark of Trust and Competence: Promote affiliate membership as a mark of trust and competence, assuring veteran clients of the high level of service and care they can expect.
- Visibility and Opportunities: Enhance the visibility of affiliate members and provide them with opportunities to participate in Institute-led initiatives, workshops, and events focused on veteran support.

By implementing this transition plan, the proposed Institute can effectively integrate qualified professionals into its affiliate membership structure, ensuring they are recognised for their expertise while enhancing their ability to serve veterans and their families. This approach not only reinforces the Institute's standards but also builds a professional community committed to veteran-centric care and support.

These transition recommendations for all membership categories aim to facilitate a smooth transition for existing practitioners while establishing a robust framework for maintaining professional competence and ensuring high-quality support for veterans. By recognising current qualifications and providing clear pathways to full accreditation, the proposed system supports both continuity and growth within the field.

## The New Landscape of Veteran Support in Australia

The relationship between the proposed Institute of Veterans Advocates and a proposed Independent National Peak Body overseeing veteran affairs is pivotal to creating a cohesive and effective support system for veterans and their families. Each entity would play a distinct yet complementary role, collaborating to enhance advocacy efforts and streamline services.

**Distinct Roles and Responsibilities:** The Institute would focus primarily on developing and supporting a network of skilled advocates/veteran support practitioners who work directly with veterans, assisting them in navigating the complexities of accessing benefits, healthcare, and other essential services. Its role would include training, accrediting members, and ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary resources and knowledge to effectively support veterans.

The National Peak Body would operate at a strategic and policy level. It would serve as the overarching organisation advocating for veterans' rights and interests at the national level. This body would engage with government, policymakers, and other stakeholders to influence legislation, secure funding, and ensure that the needs of veterans and their families are a national priority.

**Collaboration and Communication:** The Institute and the National Peak Body would need to maintain a strong, collaborative relationship characterised by open communication and shared





goals. The Institute could provide the National Peak Body with valuable insights and data gathered from frontline advocacy work. This information would be crucial in shaping policy recommendations and identifying systemic issues that require attention.

The National Peak Body could support the Institute by advocating for policies that improve the conditions and resources available for frontline advocates. It could also facilitate partnerships with other organisations and government bodies to enhance the training and professional development opportunities available to advocates.

**Unified Advocacy Efforts:** By working in tandem, the Institute and the National Peak Body can present a unified front in advocating for veterans' issues. This collaboration would ensure that both grassroots and policy-level advocacy efforts are aligned, amplifying their impact. For instance, while the Institute addresses individual veterans' needs through its advocates, the National Peak Body can tackle broader systemic challenges that affect the veteran community as a whole.

**Resource Sharing and Efficiency:** Collaboration between the two entities could lead to more efficient use of resources. By sharing research, training materials, and advocacy tools, they can reduce redundancy and ensure that both organisations are working towards common objectives without unnecessary overlap.

In summary, the Institute and the proposed independent National Peak Body would have a symbiotic relationship. The Institute would focus on empowering advocates to provide direct support to veterans, while the National Peak Body would drive policy change and national advocacy efforts. Together, they would form a comprehensive framework that addresses both immediate and long-term needs of veterans and their families, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are met on all fronts.

## Concluding remarks

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. As someone who has had to navigate the veteran advocacy world, it is my strongly held view that a coordinated and structured approach to the sector via an Institute and industry body is necessary. It is essential that the corporate knowledge of many volunteer advocates and practitioners be captured and capitalised on before they retire from their roles. I also want to express my willingness to engage in further discussions with the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) Committee and the relevant DVA staff as part of this ongoing consultation process. I am vested in this sector and personally committed to collaboration, which underscores my dedication to ensuring that the proposed Institute reflects the collective insights and expertise of all stakeholders involved. I look forward to continuing this constructive dialogue and building a robust and effective national body that meets the needs of the veteran community.





## About the author - Jacqui Van de Velde

Jacqui has more than 30 years experience in education, wellbeing, mental health and community engagement in both a professional and volunteer capacity. Through her consultancy, Van de Velde, she has worked in, and continues to work across, a variety of business, education and community contexts, in Australia, New Zealand, the EU, Singapore, and North America. Jacqui has contributed to the development and implementation of professional standards in Australia and internationally, reviewing their evidence base, compliance and material impact on the populations the professions service.

Jacqui is an advocate for veteran health<sup>1</sup>, and advocacy<sup>2</sup>, wellbeing, parent and family engagement, positive growth outcomes in education, professional learning networks and continuing education in the workplace. She is a sought after speaker and trainer in wellbeing and resilience with a specific focus on solution focused techniques. She is the author of a national qualification in Veteran Support Services.<sup>3</sup>

Jacqui is currently on the board of two non-profits: The Australasian Solution Focused Association and the Pro Patria Centre, a medical treatment and holistic care centre for veterans and first responders located in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> "Working On What Works in Veteran Wellbeing" VWS 2020 Wellbeing Australia

<sup>2</sup> Submission 36

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/TransitionfromtheADF/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/TransitionfromtheADF/Submissions)

<sup>3</sup> <https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/11153NAT>