



Operational Working Party February 2025

Operational Working Party Meeting

The Operational Working Party (OWP) met on Friday, 21 February 2025.

Member Submissions

mTBI (Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries) Update on DVA Actions to date and planned for the future (The Australian Special Air Service Association)

Members noted the Department of Veterans' Affairs engagement and actions with respect to new or emerging research on the effects of repetitive low-level blast (rLLB) overpressure and links to mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI).

Members noted DVA will provide Members with an update regarding outcomes from a rolling international literature review and any research which provides significant evidence of a causal relationship between rLLB and neurocognitive conditions, will be referred to the RMA. Commissions will also brief the RMA on this work in coming months.

DVA Critical Initiatives

Advocacy Update

Members noted the update on the public consultation for the Institute of Veteran's Advocates; and the motion passed in the Parliament for referral of matters regarding veteran advocacy to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by 5 August 2025.

Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2029

Members noted the update on the joint Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the current public consultation process underway.

Upcoming proposed amendments to Chapter 23 and 25 of GARP M

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) provided an update to the Operational Working Party on 21 February 2025 on the new Guide to Determining Impairment and Compensation Amendment Instrument 2025 which amends Chapter 23 and Chapter 25 of the Guide to Determining Impairment and Compensation 2016 (GARP M).

GARP M is used for determining the amount of permanent impairment (PI) compensation payable under the Military, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA). The proposed amendments include instructions to guide decision makers in the correct application of the formulas in Chapters 23 and Chapter 25. This ensures the correct application of the formulas for consistent outcomes for veterans.

DVA will seek approval of additional changes to GARP M relating to the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 (VETS Bill) which will be required prior to the proposed new arrangements from 1 July 2026. DVA will engage with the ex-service community where appropriate to ensure community views are taken into account.

Expansion To Who Can Diagnose Depression and Anxiety For Initial Liability Claims

There has long been advocacy to expand who can diagnose mental health conditions for initial liability claims. Now, in addition to diagnoses from psychiatrists, DVA will also accept a diagnosis of anxiety and depressive disorders from a treating Clinical Psychologist and be able to utilise clinical

psychologist reports obtained during and immediately after service for anxiety and depressive disorders. This will help reduce the workload for psychiatrists, improve access to a broader range of providers to assist with claims and help simplify the liability process.

Updates provided for Information

Claims Processing Update

The most recent claims reporting data can be accessed through the DVA Claims Processing Webpage: <https://www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing>, which encompasses all key metrics relating to the claims process.

Should you encounter any difficulties in viewing or downloading the data, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for assistance.

Transport – Booked Car with Driver update

DVA is pleased to announce an update to the access criteria for clients aged 79 years or younger who use the Booked Car with Driver (BCWD) service. The 'Treatment Location' criterion has been removed, which means younger clients with access to BCWD can use the service to travel to a broader range of health appointments, including general practice and allied health clinics. This was a criterion that applied only to clients aged 79 years or younger; there is no change in access for clients who are: aged 80 years or older, living with dementia (any age) or legally blind (any age). An updated infographic outlining the improved criteria is available on the DVA Website.

Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program and Saluting their Service Commemorative Grants Program Update

The Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program offers funding of up to \$200,000 for ex-service organisations (ESOs) or non-ESOs in a consortium with at least one ESO to undertake projects and activities that sustain or enhance health and social wellbeing, build community capacity, potentially expand on existing

projects, and raise awareness of important issues faced by the veteran community. For further information, visit www.dva.gov.au/VWG.

The Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program commemorates the service and sacrifice of Australia's service personnel in wars, conflicts and peace operations, and their families. Grants of up to \$150,000 are available under the program. For further information, visit www.dva.gov.au/STSgrants.

Update on Handling of Personal Information Project

The Handling of Personal Information (HOPI) Project was initiated to ensure DVA's handling of personal information (collection, use and disclosure) is best practice and compliant with relevant requirements such as:

- The Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) – a set of 13 rules within the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) that regulate handling of personal information; and
- The Australian Government Agencies Privacy Code – a binding legislative instrument applied to all Australian Government agencies subject to the Privacy Act, including adherence to the APPs.

The HOPI Project also aims to ensure that DVA stakeholders, including veterans and families, researchers and other government agencies, have confidence in DVA's handling of personal information.

Phase 1 of the project ran from April 2024 to November 2024, focusing on work including to update internal guidance documents:

- Establishing a comprehensive draft blueprint to guide DVA's activities in best practice in privacy management;
- Conducting a stocktake and analysis of personal information collection processes that includes collection method, storage, use and disclosure;
- Developing capability development plans for both privacy and data to provide consistent, systematic and tailored training and support; and
- Developing a Communication, Change and Culture Management Strategy

Phase 2 of the HOPI Project commenced on 2 December 2024 and is expected to be completed in late 2025. Phase 2 will continue to progress the Department towards:

- Implementing and embedding a comprehensive compliance framework regarding the collection, consent management, use, sharing, storage and retention of personal information.
- Continuing to strengthen trust with veterans, families, researchers, and other stakeholders by demonstrating transparency, ethical data use, and robust privacy protections.
- Establishment of a privacy-by-design approach, embedding data literacy and privacy capabilities for all staff.

Other Business

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

- Approval for Medical Procedures
- The ongoing role of the Operational Working Party