



# Ex-Service Organisations Round Table March 2025

## Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Tuesday, 25 March 2025.

### DVA update – Secretary [Alison Frame, DVA]

The Secretary provided an update, including indicating a Federal Budget update later in the evening. She briefed ESORT members on further improvements DVA is achieving in regard to the time taken to process claims, DVA staffing levels and the work underway to create an Institute of Veterans' Advocates to establish and maintain higher professional standards and best practice. Secretary Frame also updated members on DVA's continued focus on business and process improvements, the need for investment in DVA's ICT systems, the recent passing by the Australian Parliament of legislation to simplify and harmonise the veterans' legislation framework, and arrangements for this year's overseas Anzac Day commemorations.

## ESORT Member Submissions

### Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War (Air Force Association)

DVA formally recognises the dates of Australian involvement in the Vietnam War as spanning from 2 July 1962 to 29 April 1975. Australian involvement commenced in July 1962 and expanded to include all armed services.

While Australia formally announced the end of its active involvement in the war in Vietnam on 11 January 1973, in 1975 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) provided crucial humanitarian assistance in the war's final days. The

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Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans also reflects service occurring between 2 July 1962 and 29 April 1975.

The National Vietnam memorial on Anzac Parade is managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA). DVA undertook to write to the NCA in support of the submission to add 1975 to the Memorial, and noting the unanimous support of ESORT.

### **Measuring the success of the Wellbeing Hubs (Returned and Services League of Australia)**

The Department has engaged La Trobe University to design and undertake an evaluation of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs program.

The Hubs deliver integrated support to veterans and families, including wellbeing support, advocacy, employment and housing advice, social connection and physical and mental health services. The service delivery model for each hub varies and the range of services provided at each location is determined based on local veteran community needs.

The evaluation aims to gather a community-centred view of the experience of people who are using hubs, including their expectations, needs, satisfaction levels, concerns and the supports they receive. The evaluation will also seek to understand the views of other stakeholders, including those who are not accessing the hubs and barriers to access.

The evaluation is expected to focus on two of the initial six hubs that were established, the Shoalhaven Veteran and Family Hub in Nowra and the Mates4Mates Veteran & Family Wellbeing Centre in Darwin. Nowra and Darwin were selected due to their difference in demographic, service types, post-service nature and service providers. This will provide a broad cross-section of the community. It is anticipated that the lessons learned from these locations will be valuable across the national hubs network.

The evaluation is expected to be finalised in late 2025. DVA invited ESORT to have a representative on the Evaluation Advisory Group.

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## **DVA Critical Initiatives**

### **Update on the consultation and co-design process for the establishment of a new agency to focus on veteran wellbeing and an ESO Peak Body**

On 2 December 2024, the Government released its response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission, agreeing to most of the recommendations. As part of the response, the Government provided \$4.5 million to DVA to undertake consultation on transition and wellbeing supports, including the co-design of a new agency focused on wellbeing within the Department, and separately, to continue to consult on the development of a national peak body (Recommendations 80, 87 and 89). The Department has engaged some external expertise to support it in its consultation and co-design approach. A range of inputs such as submissions and co-design forums will inform proposals to be presented to government for consideration.

### **Claims Lodgement Support Model**

The claims lodgement support model was developed in response to feedback from Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) that they were experiencing a large increase in referrals for pensions and advocacy services and experiencing difficulty in meeting the demand. Under the model, DVA staff meet with veterans and assist them to lodge their claims. This support has resulted in an easing of workloads for the ESOs involved. To date the model has been delivered to areas of need in response to approaches made to DVA and will continue to be available upon request.

Members were also briefed on the progress on the Institute of Veterans' Advocates and the impact it will have on unscrupulous providers and fee-for-service agents. A motion was passed in the Australian 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.

### **DVA Website Enhancement Project**

The Department is enhancing its website to improve the user experience and navigation, be responsive on all devices and to be more modern and accessible.

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## **Business Improvements**

DVA continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of Australia's veterans through several business improvements.

DVA's rehabilitation program has increased the availability of social wellbeing initiatives offered with funding of up to \$2,000 available per participant. A new activity flyer promoting social wellbeing activities and how veterans can access these through rehabilitation was published to DVA's website. This will provide not only greater choice for veterans, but greater control over their rehabilitation plans and faster access to services.

Improvements associated with health treatment include the commencement of a six-month trial relating to clinically necessary GP referred MRIs on 7 October 2024. This trial complements other internal improvements for a streamlined assessment process for some low-risk Medical Expenses Privately Incurred (MEPI) applications, delivering faster services to veterans and streamlining administrative requirements.

Changes supporting eligible VEA clients travelling to approved medical treatment under the Booked Car with Driver service include the removal of treatment location criterion and simplification of the specified medical condition criterion for veterans aged 79 years or younger, clarifying and improving access for clients requiring assistance. Enhancements to MyService now enable MRCA clients to include road tolls in their online travel reimbursement claims.

DVA's Business Improvement Team can be contacted on:

[PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au](mailto:PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au)

## **Psychiatric Assistance Dog (PAD) Pilot**

Members were provided with an update on the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program's new initiative – a public access rights card, which is being piloted in 2025. Veterans with an assistance dog are provided with a wallet-sized card containing information about the public access rights of assistance dogs nationally. The card is already assisting the Program's 367 veterans to educate operators in the community, ensuring the assistance dog can go wherever their veteran handler can.

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## **Other Business**

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

- a brief update was received from the Younger Veterans Contemporary Needs Forum.

## **Items below the line**

### **Women Veterans' Strategy**

ESORT Members were provided with an update on the Women Veterans' Strategy that is under development and the consultation process to date. Members raised the need for more women advocates and suggested this could be a component of the strategy.

Papers were provided on the following topics but not discussed in detail:

- Legislative Reform Update
- Advocacy Update and Claims Handling
- Claims Processing Update
- Aged and Community Care Update
- Veteran Hearing Services Framework Update
- Transport – Booked Car with Driver
- Update on Artificial Intelligence
- Joint Transition Authority (JTA) Update