



FORUM SUMMARY

The Deputy Chair congratulated Craig Gear, Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) Medal of the Order of Australia in this year's Australia Day Honours List for his service to aged welfare and seniors' rights.

Emergency Access to Prescription Medicines

Chris Flood, Senior Pharmacist & National Manager PBS Operations & Strategy, PGA presented on the temporary provisions brought in by ACT, NSW, VIC and SA in response to the 2020 bushfires. The changes permitted pharmacists to dispense in emergency situations, a standard PBS pack and for non-PBS, the smallest manufacturer pack. Concurrently, the Commonwealth expanded the Continued Dispensing arrangements so emergency supplies of PBS/RPBS medicines could be subsidised. The emergency situations considered include workers who were working away from home for long periods of time, displaced travellers and those who were evacuated from their homes.

Chief Health Officer Update

Dr Trish Batchelor, Acting Chief Health Officer, spoke about COVID-19, HealthPathways, Telehealth services, webinars and access to telehealth services for veterans. Dr Batchelor mentioned an Audiology Australia webinar held by Jason Ridgway which was well received. She also noted her upcoming involvement in the OPAN webinar *Understanding and Accessing Department of Veterans' Affairs Services Webinar 1: Introduction to DVA Services*. Dr Batchelor was interested to hear how industry and supply chains were being affected by COVID-19 and that she would welcome attendees to provide this feedback to her via the Chair. Telehealth services are available for all mental health conditions for eligible veterans through DVA's Veteran Cards. DVA is well placed to respond to an increase in anxiety and stress around COVID-19. Additionally, veterans have access to Open ARMS. Attendees raised the importance for continuity of home support and social connection in the older community.

DVA budget measure *Improved Dental and Allied Health* – update

Chris Reed, Director, Health Policy, provided an update on the Dental and Allied Health fee schedule. The updated fee schedules were pushed back to April 2020. The four fee schedules related to Clinical psychologists, Occupational therapists (mental health), Psychologists and Social Workers (mental health) were updated with telehealth items in response to COVID-19 and for implementation from 13 March 2020. Attendees noted and appreciated the prompt responses from the Health Policy team.

Agenda Item 5 - Veteran Wellbeing Centres

Michael Annett, Acting Deputy Commissioner, advised that the six Veteran Wellbeing Centres being built will help connect veterans and their families into a range of core services that include support for transition, employment, health and social connection. The Centres are to be located in Townsville, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Wodonga and Nowra. Attendees raised the question of how providers can be involved. Once the centres begin to operate, arrangements for service providers will be discussed. Cath Maloney, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) provided positive feedback and applauded the approach resolving access problems in rural areas and advised that SARRAH is happy to engage with DVA about the Wellbeing Centres.

Deputy Secretary – update

Mark Cormack, Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs reiterated his interest in attending the forum to provide updates to attendees. He spoke to five initiatives that the Minister for Veterans' Affairs is prioritising:

1. Government response to the Productivity Commission report; veteran mental health and wellbeing;
2. Provider Fees;
3. Mental Health National Action Plan;
4. Establishment of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention; and
5. 75th anniversary of World War II.

Strategic Research Framework

Dr Paul Nicolarakis, Chief Data Officer updated attendees on DVA's Strategic Research Framework and its priorities for 2020 which are wellbeing, right care, service impact, suicide, compensation and exposures. Dr Nicolarakis advised the Forum that a question about whether someone has served in the ADF would now be included in Australia's *2021 Census of Population and Housing*, pending it reaching 15 sittings days of disallowance in both Houses of Parliament.

New DVA website is now live

Tess Nobile, Change Manager, Digital Transformation ran attendees through the provider pages on the new DVA website that was launched on 4 March 2020. She thanked attendees for the assistance they had provided which helped to shape the provider pages. Additional tiles to the provider page including a link to all provider forms will be added in the coming months. Noting there was a client focus for the launch of the website, the Pat bot is still learning and providers were encouraged to ask questions of Pat to help shape the information. Attendees identified that nurse practitioners had not been included on the list of providers. Ongoing feedback regarding provider pages and the DVA website is encouraged.

Provider Communication and Engagement

- **HealthPathways:** DVA is collaborating with North Queensland Primary Health Network (PHN) to create a Veteran pathway within the program HealthPathways used by PHNs. To find out more about/or access HealthPathways, visit www.healthpathwayscommunity.org or enquire with your local PHN. Attendees provided feedback on a preliminary list of key topics and information that would assist health practitioners using the Veteran HealthPathways.
- **Draft Provider Engagement Framework:** The Provider Engagement Framework sets out the Department's roadmap to enable our staff to plan and deliver DVA tailored engagement and communication activities. The purpose of the Framework is to engage with providers in a more productive and coordinated manner that would improve the provider experience. Feedback was provided by attendees regarding current methods used between DVA and Providers.
- **Claims Rejection Data:** A series of interactive questions guided the discussion about provider claims. Some key findings included: the need for increased provider/practitioner education, push for smaller providers to engage with online claiming and greater transparency of data. Nick Bradshaw, Osteopathy Australia suggested including QR codes on manual forms to direct providers to online claims.

Rehabilitation in the Home Program

DVA is in the process of establishing a Rehabilitation in the Home (RITH) Program for eligible DVA Health Card Holders. This new program will provide DVA clients with the choice to access high quality functional rehabilitation care in their home in a familiar setting, as an alternative to, or in addition to, admitted care in hospital. Responses to the Request for Information closed on 2 March 2020 and DVA are now reviewing responses. Attendees expressed concern that panels may approve large companies due to long standing relationships with DVA rather than the best service provider. Leo Flynn Director, Innovative Care Models, clarified that DVA will follow the required procurement processes

Protective Security Framework

Karen Pickering, Assistant Secretary, Provider Engagement and Management Branch discussed three new or updated whole of government policies that were introduced in 2019 and which must be complied with when submitting a tender, including:

1. Protective Security Framework;
2. Black Economy Procurement Connected Policy - Increasing the Integrity of Government Procurement; and
3. Modern Day Slavery Act 2018.