

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S CONSULTATION FORUM - ACT
MINUTES OF THE 20th MEETING
6 March 2018

Present

Ms Maralyn Newman – Acting Deputy Commissioner NSW/ACT (Chair)
Mr Hadyn White – Executive Officer to the Deputy Commissioner (Secretary)
Mr John King - The Returned & Services League of Australia
Ms Pat McCabe OAM – Kindred Organisations Committee and TPI Association
LTCOL Les Bienkiewicz (Ret'd) - Defence Force Welfare Association
Mr Rob Connor - Canberra Legacy
Ms Kim Daniells – Director Client Contact & Support

1. Opening

1.1 Welcome, Membership, Apologies and Adoption of Agenda

- 1.1.1 In the temporary absence of the Chair, Mr White opened the meeting at 11:05, welcoming Members to the 20th meeting of the Deputy Commissioner's ACT Consultation Forum.
- 1.1.2 Apologies were received from Mr Ian Thompson, Veterans' Support Centre Belconnen, and Mrs Annette Sadler, War Widows' Guild.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Business Arising

- 2.1 Members confirmed the minutes of meeting 19 held on 29 November 2017.
- 2.2 Responding to Ms McCabe's request for an update on the Assistance Dog Trial (item 3.9), it was noted that DVA is currently undertaking a procurement activity to identify one or more suitable service providers with the specialist capabilities and capacity to inform and deliver the trial in partnership with DVA. As this procurement is still ongoing, DVA cannot provide further detail at this stage, but an announcement is expected soon. Details on how veterans can participate in the trial will be available when a service provider is contracted.
- 2.3 In relation to Assisted Dying legislation (item 5.4.2), Mr White confirmed that policy issues were under consideration and that information, when available, would be provided out of session.

3. Updates on Key Business Areas and Initiatives

3.1 New Minister

3.1.1 Members noted that, since the last meeting, the Hon Michael McCormack MP, had been appointed as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Personnel, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC with effect from 20 December 2017. Members further noted that, with the resignation of the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP as Deputy Prime Minister with effect from 26 February 2018 and subsequent ministerial reshuffle, the Hon Darren Chester MP has replaced Mr McCormack with effect from 5 March 2018.

3.2 Staffing Update

3.2.1 Members also noted a number of senior staffing changes in the Department:

- John Geary is the First Assistant Secretary, Claims and Operations, with an SES Band 1 position now established to undertake the role of Deputy Commissioner Victoria.
- Mark Garrity joined DVA on 8 January, transferring from the Department of Human Services to the role of Assistant Secretary, Mental and Social Health.
- From 11 January, John Sadeik substantively moved to the role of Deputy Commissioner NSW/ACT.
- Karen Pickering joined DVA on 30 January, transferring from the Department of Health to the role of Assistant Secretary, Provider Engagement and Assurance.
- Leonie Nowland transferred from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to take up the role of Deputy Commissioner Victoria on 29 January.
- Alex Gerrick, Assistant Secretary Communications and Engagement Branch, will be leaving DVA on 28 March 2018.

3.2.2 Ms Jane Anderson has been appointed as Principal Member to the Veterans' Review Board for five years commencing 31 January 2018. She has served as a part time member of the Board since 2015 and brings 17 years post-admission and administrative law and practice experience to the role.

3.3 Complaints & Feedback Management

3.3.1 The Chair reported Feedback Management System data for the financial year to 5 March, compared with 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 data:

National	2014/15	%	2015/16	%	2016/17	%	1/7/17- 5/3/18	%
Complaints	3,058	80.4	2,304	76.3	2,866	75	1,699	71.4
Compliments	747	19.6	716	23.7	960	25	680	28.6
Total Feedback	3,805		3,020		3,826		2,379	

3.4 AIHW Report

3.4.1 Members were reminded that the detailed final report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study examining the incidence of suicide among serving and ex-serving personnel was released on 19 January. The results largely support earlier findings and show that ex-serving men aged 18-29 are at higher risk of suicide when compared to Australian men of the same age, with the research providing strong evidence to help target ex-serving ADF personnel most at risk.

3.5 Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme

3.5.1 The first two reports, Mental Health Prevalence and Pathways to Care, are expected to be released soon, with the remaining reports will be delivered progressively throughout 2018.

3.6 ANZAC Day - France

3.6.1 This year's ANZAC Day Dawn Service at Villers-Bretonneux will mark 100 years since the Australian 13th and 15th Brigades successfully retook the village from German forces in a surprise night attack. There are currently more than 6,500 people registered to attend, with site capacity limited to 7,400.

3.6.2 The Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux will be officially opened on Tuesday, 24 April 2018.

3.7 At-Ease Channel Redevelopment

3.7.1 The updated At-Ease web channel is expected to be in production later this month. New clinically sound mental health information/resources for serving and ex-serving members, families and professional networks will be released. Work has also been conducted to better operate with DVA's eMental Health products HighRes, Operation Life, the Right Mix and PTSD Coach.

3.8 Australia Post Trial

3.8.1 Since launching in December, the pilot information service at Australia Post's Woden outlet has been increasing access to information about veterans' services. Informal feedback from Australia Post staff is positive about the customer experience.

3.8.2 Along with posters and brochures, people are able to access information through the iMac kiosk, with around 1 in 3 uses navigating through to information about DVA services. Part of DVA's VCR program, this trial aims to reach veterans and their families who may not have had any prior contact with DVA.

3.9 **Community Grants Hub**

3.9.1 Veteran & Community Grants are open on the Hub, with the Grants In Aid, Building Excellence in Support & Training (BEST) and Saluting Their Service Community Commemorative Grants opening in March. Saluting Their Service Major Commemorative Grants will open in May, with Supporting Younger Veterans available grants in July.

3.9.2 Grant applicants will be able to get assistance through the Hub hotline on 1800 020 283, and those who require extra support with technology will have access to training through the Department of Social Services' initiative Be Connected – improving digital literacy for older Australians providing training in both city and regional areas:
<https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/>

3.9.3 DVA will finalise the processing of current rounds of grants before the transition to the Hub is complete and will maintain ownership of policy relating to our grants. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs will still approve successful DVA grants.

3.10 **Head to Health – Veterans Channel**

3.10.1 Late last year the new Australian Digital Mental Health gateway – Head to Health – went live. Head to Health is the result of an extensive co-design process between the Australian Government Department of Health; people and families with a lived experience of mental health issues; mental health organisations; service providers; health professionals; and the Australian public. DVA is a key partner in this initiative.

3.10.2 With direct links to DVA's At Ease website and DVA and VVCS mobile apps and resource, the gateway should maximise the reach and effectiveness of the online mental health assistance available to our clients, particularly those who may not identify as veterans initially. The veteran channel is viewable at: <https://headtohealth.gov.au/supporting-yourself/support-for/veterans>.

3.11 **International Ministerial (5 Eyes) Conference**

3.11.1 Following the London 2017 International Ministerial (5 Eyes) Conference on Veterans' Issues, the then Minister announced that the Australian Government would host the next International Conference coinciding with the 2018 Invictus Games taking place in Sydney from 20-27 October. The conference is scheduled to take place from 20 to 21 October, and it is anticipated that ministerial-level representatives from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand will attend.

3.11.2 The Minister will also host the Invictus Games 18 Symposium on 19 October. The symposium theme will focus on transition, covering the determinants of wellbeing with a focus on recovery. On 27 October, the Minister will convene a sitting of the Veteran Ministers' Round Table in Sydney to discuss with his state government counterparts the outcomes and successes from the various forums.

3.12 **Men's Health Peer Education**

3.12.1 Members noted that at the ESO Round Table November 2017 meeting, the Secretary agreed to update the Men's Health Peer Education program and expand its reach to promote women's and contemporary veterans' health.

3.13 **Veterans' Medicines Advice and Therapeutics Education Services (Veterans' MATES)**

3.13.1 Topic 2017-4, Depression Management, was disseminated to 13,607 veterans on 18 January 2018. Preparation for e-delivery of this topic to a small number of GPs is still in progress as part of the pilot to develop e-delivery for Veterans' MATES topics.

3.13.2 Topic 2018-1, Medicines and Falls materials will be disseminated to GPs, pharmacists and directors of care at Aged Care Facilities on 16 March and to targeted DVA clients on 18 April.

3.14 **Rehabilitation Success Stories**

3.14.1 A series of rehabilitation success stories is progressing, with two new stories published in December 2017, and two further stories expected to be published in early 2018. The DVA rehabilitation success stories aim to improve communication with clients and messaging about DVA rehabilitation. The stories are about people who have successfully gone through the process of being discharged and rehabilitated, often back into the workforce. Having veterans participating and sharing their own experiences also encourages others to seek rehabilitation assistance.

3.14.2 As of January 2018, 18 success stories have been published on the rehabilitation page on the DVA website. They are also being incorporated into social media messaging through Facebook and Twitter and have been sourced by other areas of the department for publications such as e-news, MHPE newsletters, Vet affairs, and the Ministerial Statement on Veterans and Their Families.

3.15 **Out of Session Correspondence**

3.15.1 Members noted information provided since the last meeting:

- Service access over the Christmas/New Year period.
- VITA insurance coverage, DVA rehabilitation.
- DVA mailing addresses, Advocacy News.

4. General Business

4.1 The Returned & Services League of Australia

4.1.1 Mr King reported a significant surge, in the order of 25%, in the provision of support services over the past 6 months. As well as an increase in claims, welfare visits has also increased markedly, due in part to the ageing of carers and their decreasing capability.

4.1.2 Pleasingly, younger veteran sub-branch membership has increased this year with 11 joining direct from Defence. This has flagged some criticism of the transition process, particularly in relation to RAAF members; a view supported by Colonel Bienkiewicz and Mr Connor. Mr King also provided an update on planning for this year's ANZAC Day march, noting that workload had necessitated the rescheduling of the ACT RSL Congress to 23 June.

4.2 TPI Association

4.2.1 Ms McCabe advised that the TPI National Congress is scheduled for 26-28 March. Current issues of concern relate to the provision of hearing aids and audiologist charges, and assisted living for veterans deemed too young for aged care services.

4.3 Defence Force Welfare Association

4.3.1 Colonel Bienkiewicz informed the Forum that, at the national level, the major issue was a push for inclusion of the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation within the Financial Services Royal Commission terms of reference. Mr Connor also flagged Legacy's support, citing issues with the processing of reversionary pensions.

4.3.2 At the ACT level, the DFWA also reported an increase in claims for general welfare assistance, particular from those aged in their 30s and suffering from PTSD or other mental health condition. Colonel Bienkiewicz also commented on the number of advocates not participating in the ATDP, and therefore not covered by VITA insurance. Mr King confirmed that advice had been received confirming coverage for advocates under the RSL's existing public liability coverage. Mr Connor, referring to the checklist of activities indication ATDP accreditation, also expressed a view that the program would not be able to handle the workload.

4.4 Canberra Legacy

4.4.1 Mr Connor noted a downturn in workload resulting from the loss of World War 2 widows, with modelling indicating around 20-25% of clients by 2025. This is posing questions about managing non-viable clubs.

4.4.2 Mr Connor advised Legacy Australia personnel changes with Mr Rick Cranna and Mr Peter Lawley, both from Brisbane Water (NSW) Legacy Club, filling the positions of Chairman and CEO respectively. With the departure of Ms Jenny Walker from Legacy, Mr Connor has assumed most of her functions.

4.5 **Stats At A Glance**

- 4.5.1 Members, noting the September 2017 *Stats At A Glance* publication, requested additional information. It is intended, with the issue of white Repatriation Health Cards on transition scheduled to be implemented from 1 May 2018, that non-liability health care for mental health conditions data will be captured on card activation.
- 4.5.2 On December 2017 data, there are 330 clients eligible for Special Rate Disability Pension under the *Military Rehabilitation & Compensation Act, 2004*, and 3,184 clients with a white Repatriation Health Card for treatment of non-liability mental health conditions who are otherwise not entitled.

5. **Next Meeting**

- 5.1 Members will be invited to the 2018 Budget briefing scheduled for Wednesday, 9 May. The following meeting is scheduled for 11:00, Wednesday, 22 August.

6. **Meeting Close**

- 6.1 Ms Newman closed the meeting at 2:35pm.



Hadyn White
Executive Officer to the Deputy Commissioner NSW & ACT
Secretary ACT Consultation Forum