

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S CONSULTATION FORUM - ACT
MINUTES OF THE 21st MEETING
22 August 2018

Present

Ms Michelle Glanville – 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
Mrs Robynne Mitchell – War Widows' Guild of Australia
Ms Pat McCabe OAM – Kindred Organisations Committee and TPI Association
BRIG Kerry Mellor (Ret'd) - Defence Force Welfare Association
Mr Geoff Bolwell – Veterans' Support Centre Belconnen
Mr Rob Connor - Canberra Legacy

1. Opening

1.1 Welcome, Membership, Apologies and Adoption of Agenda

1.1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at 10:40, welcoming representatives to the 21st meeting of the Deputy Commissioner's ACT Consultation Forum and apologising for the error in venue booking and subsequent relocations.

1.1.2 Apologies were received from:

- LTCOL Les Bienkiewicz (Ret'd), Defence Force Welfare Association, represented by BRIG Kerry Mellor (Ret'd);
- Mrs Annette Sadler, War Widows' Guild, represented by Mrs Robynne Mitchell; and
- Mr Ian Thompson, Veterans' Support Centre Belconnen, represented by Mr Geoff Bolwell.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Business Arising

2.1 Members confirmed the minutes of meeting 20 held on 6 March 2018.

2.2 Responding to a question from Mrs Mitchell in relation to Assisted Dying legislation (meeting 19, item 5.4.2), Mr White confirmed that policy issues were under still under consideration. Members commented on a push for legislation in the ACT and other jurisdictions, and noted the Senate's failure to repeal the euthanasia ban early this month.

3. Updates on Business Areas and Initiatives

3.1 Key Staffing Update

3.1.1 Ms Glanville advised that John Sadeik had taken leave from 29 June prior to his retirement from DVA on 20 July 2018, with Ms Maralyn Newman taking over as Deputy Commissioner NSW/ACT. Ms Glanville also noted that John Geary retired as First Assistant Secretary Clients' Benefits Division (FAS CB) on 31 July 2018. Natasha Cole, currently First Assistant Secretary of the Regulatory Practice and Support Division at the Commonwealth Department of Health, commenced as FAS CB on 20 August. Natasha previously worked at the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Immigration.

3.1.2 The current organisational chart is available at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/about%20dva/orgchart.pdf>.

3.2 Complaints & Feedback Management

3.2.1 Summary Feedback Management System reports for the financial years 2014/15 - 2017/18 were provided:

National	2014/15	%	2015/16	%	2016/17	%	2017/18	%
Complaints	3,058	80.4	2,304	76.3	2,866	75	2,473	68.7
Compliments	747	19.6	716	23.7	960	25	1,127	31.3
Total Feedback	3,805		3,020		3,826		3,600	

3.3 Census 2021 – submission requesting veteran indicator

3.3.1 Members noted that DVA has made a submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) public consultation process requesting the inclusion of a 'veteran indicator' topic in the survey questions for Census 2021. The submission is available on the ABS Census consultation website. If successful, veteran Census data will enable DVA to establish a more complete profile of Australia's veterans and help support targeted service delivery.

3.4. Support for Veterans through Improved Compensation Arrangements – Stepdowndown for Incapacity Payments for Veterans Studying

3.4.1 Members were reminded that this 2018-19 Budget initiative will provide eligible veterans with incapacity payments based on 100% of their normal earnings when engaged in a DVA rehabilitation program and, as part of that program, undertaking full-time study to secure ongoing meaningful employment. This measure is applicable under both the DRCA and MRCA and will be effective from 1 November 2018.

3.5. Annual GP Health Assessment

3.5.1 Members also noted that the Annual GP Health Assessment for the 'First Five Years Post-discharge' initiative will enable all ADF personnel transitioning from 1 July 2019 to access an annual comprehensive health assessment by a GP for the first five years post discharge.

- 3.6. **Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) Re-brand**
- 3.6.1 VVCS is undertaking broad community engagement and consultation to develop, test and co-design potential future brands to better meet the needs and expectations and to increase the awareness of VVCS' service offering.
- 3.7 **Alcohol and other Substance Use Disorder Treatment Panel**
- 3.7.1 The Alcohol and other Drug Treatment Services Panel has recently been extended for a further two years to 30 September 2020. The multidisciplinary panel is made up of community-based providers capable of offering high quality, best practice and cost-effective treatment to entitled clients.
- 3.7.2 The panel enhances geographic and service type/setting options, including in the areas of assessment, referral, withdrawal management, psychotherapy, group programs, supported accommodation, residential treatment, case management, pharmacotherapy and after-care.
- 3.7.3 There are currently 22 contracted providers on the panel that collectively provide national coverage for these services. The panel is available through DVA's At Ease website which is also being redeveloped.
- 3.8 **Coordinated Veterans' Care (CVC) Mental Health Pilot**
- 3.8.1 Amendments to the Veterans Entitlements' Act 1986 and the Military Rehabilitation Compensation Act 2004 to extend eligibility for the CVC Program to White Card holders for the purpose of participating in the Pilot came into effect on 25 April 2018. These changes, primarily targeted at younger DVA clients who would benefit from early clinical intervention for mild to moderate anxiety or depression with chronic pain, enable participation.
- 3.8.2 White Card holders now have access, through a GP-developed care plan, to up to 12 months of coordinated care through the CVC Program. The Pilot is due to end by 31 December 2019.
- 3.9 **Review of online provider training**
- 3.9.1 DVA has commenced a review of the veteran-specific online training programs for health professionals available through DVA, in response to 'Recommendation 4' of the Senate Inquiry Report into Veteran Suicide. The review is focusing on the requirements and incentives for health professionals to undertake online training. Consultation with health professional peak bodies and ex-service organisations is currently underway.
- 3.10 **Mental Health Clinical Management Pilot**
- 3.10.1 DVA has partnered with beyondblue to deliver the Veterans Suicide Prevention Pilot.
- 3.10.2 beyondblue have adapted the established 'The Way Back Support Service' specifically for ex-serving ADF members. The pilot aims to test a coordinated approach that provides intensive, non-clinical support to those who have attempted suicide, are experiencing a suicidal crisis or are at risk of suicide after their discharge from hospital.
- 3.10.3 The service will provide assertive outreach to ex-serving members and veterans as part of their discharge from hospital. This could include developing a safety plan, connecting people with informal and formal supports, and providing continuity of care by acting as a conduit between hospital and community-based services.

3.10.4 The pilot has initially being rolled out in a range of public and private hospitals in the Brisbane metropolitan region.

3.11 **Moral Injury Outcome Scale: Stage 1**

3.11.1 There is increasing international interest in the area of moral injury in military personnel, yet to date there is no measure of the outcomes of the exposure to potentially morally injurious events. With ADF as a partner, VVCS is sponsoring a new study led by Phoenix Australia and including an international collaboration of Australian, United States, United Kingdom and Canadian researchers, to develop a new moral injury outcomes scale.

3.12 **Stepping Out: Attention Reset (SOAR) Trial**

3.12.1 As an addition to the Stepping Out program, VVCS are about to commence a trial of an innovative attention control training program – the SOAR trial – with ADF personnel about to transition to civilian life.

3.12.2 The computer-based attention control training is designed to re-calibrate an individual's attention and threat detection system. VVCS is collaborating with Phoenix Australia and Tel Aviv University to conduct a randomised control trial with the aim of evaluating the efficacy of attention control training to prevent, and reduce existing, anxiety and traumatic stress symptoms in this high-risk cohort.

3.12.3 This trial is based on more than a decade of research conducted by Tel Aviv University with the Israeli Defence Forces showing that the mental health of military personnel can be significantly enhanced by attention training. If proven effective, the training program will offer a simple, affordable, accessible and preventative intervention for transitioning personnel.

3.13 **Community Nursing / RAP**

3.13.1 DVA has commenced an evaluation of the Community Nursing program.

3.13.2 Recommendations from the review of the Rehabilitation Appliances Program are due to be presented to Commissions by the end of the year. Members were invited to provide input to the review via the website or by directing feedback to RAP.Review.2018@dva.gov.au. Responding to a question from Mr Connor, Mr White confirmed that the review was looking at a wide range of aids and appliances and not just those linked with active rehabilitation programs.

3.14 **MyService updates**

3.14.1 On 30 July, MyService was expanded to enable all clients to lodge claims, including those who do not have a PMKeyS number and claims for Education Assistance.

3.14.2 Prior to the meeting, Mr Bolwell flagged a number of questions concerning MyService. In relation to plans to provide advocate access, DVA is working on how MyService will be incorporated into a third party portal, incorporating or superseding the current ESO portal. While no firm date has been set, it is likely this will occur toward the end of the current financial year.

3.14.3 Advocates may assist claimants without conflicting the terms of MyService claim lodgement, with claimants able to appoint an advocate as nominee. There has been no change to identification requirements through MyService, with any submitted documents still requiring certification. Delegates do not assist clients in identifying potential claims and, with such requests, claimants are advised to seek assistance from an ex-service or third party organisation.

3.15.3 Members were advised that changes to the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* now allowed, from 25 July 2018, veterans to claim both orally and in writing for compensation with respect to their service-related conditions. It is intended that clients will be asked during a needs assessment telephone call whether they want to make a claim for compensation.

3.15 Website Improvement Project

3.15.1 The new 'Beta' website, <https://beta.dva.gov.au> with a link to the site at the top of the current DVA website home page, was launched in July. The current DVA website will continue to be the primary site available to the public during the trial period, which is expected to run for around three months.

3.15.2 The Beta site is the first public phase in the redevelopment of the website and is a live test site for the future design. Feedback can be provided by clicking on the 'Let us know' link at the top of each page of the Beta site to access a survey form inviting users to rate their experience and provide suggestions for improvement.

3.16 DVA Activities during the Invictus Games

3.16.1 The 20-27 October Sydney 2018 Invictus Games provides a significant and relevant platform to discuss veterans' issues with national and international partners. During this period, DVA and the ADF are delivering a program of activities to highlight best practise around veterans' issues currently being pursued by participating nations and to ensure positive outcomes, particularly in the areas of transition, health and well-being, education and employment, domestically and internationally.

3.16.2 The scheduled program of activities is:

Date	Meeting	Lead
16-18 October	Warrior Care Symposium	ADF
18 October	Families and Employment Forums	DVA
19 October	Invictus Games 2018 Symposium	DVA
20-21 October	International Ministerial (5 Eyes) Conference	DVA
22 October	Defence Chiefs' Meeting	ADF
27 October	Veterans Ministers' Roundtable	DVA

3.16.3 The Minister will also host the International Ministerial (5 Eyes) conference on veterans issues with his international counterparts from Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US and a Veterans Ministers' Roundtable with his state and territory colleagues.

3.17 Extension of Reservist Benefits

3.17.1 From 1 July 2018, mental health treatment has been expanded to Reservists without Continuous Full-time Service but with:

- Disaster Relief Service;
- Border Protection Service; or
- Involvement in a serious service-related training accident.

4. Presentations

4.1 Special Forces Operations Pilot

4.1.1 Ms Glanville introduced Mr Paul Slater who provided an overview of the Special Operations Forces Pilot at Holsworthy Barracks, operating with Defence and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation.

4.1.2 Responding to BRIG Mellor, Mr Slater confirmed that the DVA team were located in the ADF Transition Centre with the Army Personnel Coordination Detachment and other support personnel. Mr Slater also responded to Mr Connor's question on transition work being done on the rehabilitation side to facilitate seamlessness of treatment.

4.2 Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS)

4.2.1 Dr Stephanie Hodson CSC, VVCS National Manager, flagged expansion of Open Arms counselling services, particularly in the ACT region. Most in attendance had been briefed the previous day on the soft launch of the Open Arms re-branding. Dr Hodson noted that the hard launch of Open Arms will take place during the Sydney Invictus Games 2018, with a plan to involve two Vietnam Veteran representatives and two contemporary veteran/serving representatives in 'handing over the legacy'.

4.2.2 Dr Hodson also noted work to move the service offering from Deakin to Woden (including establishing adequate free parking), with satellite centres established in the city and Gungahlin. BRIG Mellor queried if a directory of ACT DVA/VVCS services, locations and contacts could be provided, with Members also discussing the difficulties of identifying and linking into psychiatric/psychology/counselling support, and obtaining reports, within the ACT. While accessing face-to-face counselling would remain a longer-term issue, Dr Hodson noted work being undertaken to ensure that a 24-hour phone counselling service could be offered. Members' email addresses will be provided to Dr Hodson so that available information can be distributed and updated as to hand.

4.2.3 Responding to a question from Ms McCabe, Dr Hodson confirmed that the 1800-VETERAN number would have a direct link to Open Arms.

5. General Business

5.1 During general discussion, Members reported a number of concerns:

- Parking and costs are an issue for those attending the VAN location;
- Experienced and ageing Pension and Welfare Officers are struggling with the Advocacy Training and Development Program, with many (claims of between 30 and 90%) dropping out;
- The 'automatic' acceptance of non-liability health care (NLHC) and issue of a white Repatriation Health Card may mean that serving and former-ADF members do not pursue claims to acceptance, possible missing out on compensation and/or compromising future dependant claims;
- A lack of information is provided with the issue of a NLHC card – many receiving the card do not understand how it is used and what benefits it provides;
- Similarly, many do not understand the \$6.20 Veterans Supplement payment;
- Significant delays in obtaining information from Finance on Veteran and Community grant application lodged October 2017.

- 5.2 Mr White flagged the Minister's request for a Mefloquine outreach program to be held in Adelaide as soon as practicable, and for additional programs to be offered in other capital cities. While yet to be confirmed, the two- to three-hour program for Sydney and Canberra has been listed for Tuesday, 6 November, commencing at 1800.
- 5.3 The Forum welcomed Mr John Fely, First Assistant Secretary External Stakeholder & Government Relations, who was able to attend and participate for much of the discussion.

6. Next Meeting

- 6.1 The next meeting is scheduled for 11:00, Wednesday, 28 November 2018, with the venue to be advised.
- 6.2 Mr King has kindly offered facilities at RSL National, Fyshwick, as an alternative venue.

7. Meeting Close

- 7.1 Ms Glanville closed the meeting at 12:40pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. White', is positioned above the typed name and title.

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