

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S CONSULTATION FORUM - ACT
MINUTES OF THE 23rd MEETING
13 March 2019

Present

Ms Maralyn Newman – 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

LTCOL Les Bienkiewicz (Ret'd) - Defence Force Welfare Association

CMDR Ward Gainey – Veterans' Support Centre Belconnen

Mr Ian Wills - Canberra Legacy

Ms Elizabeth Jolley – ACT Office for Seniors and Veterans

Ms Kim Daniells – Director, Client Contact & Support

Mr Matthew McGuinness – Open Arms (via videoconference)

Dr Jenny Firman – Chief Health Officer

Ms Anne Buck – Project Manager, Health Policy (observer)

1. Opening

1.1 Welcome, Membership, Apologies and Adoption of Agenda

1.1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at 10:35, welcoming representatives to the 23rd meeting of the Deputy Commissioner's ACT Consultation Forum.

1.1.2 Apologies were received from:

- Ms Pat McCabe OAM, Kindred Organisations Committee and TPI Association;
- Mrs Annette Sadler, War Widows' Guild, represented by Mrs Robynne Mitchell;
- Mr Rob Connor, Canberra Legacy, represented by Mr Ian Wills;
- Mr Ian Thompson OAM, ATDP Regional Manager Group 2; and
- BRIG Alison Creagh CSC (Ret'd), ACT Veterans Advisory Council.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Business Arising

2.1 Members confirmed the minutes of meeting 22 held on 28 November 2018.

3. Updates on Business Areas and Initiatives

3.1 Staffing Update

3.1.1 The Chair noted changes in senior staffing:

- Brigadier Bronwyn Worswick commenced in the role of General Counsel on 17 December 2018. Bronwyn comes to DVA on secondment from Defence after two years as the Deputy Inspector-General of the ADF and is an Army legal officer with 20 years' experience.
- Paul Nothard commenced in the role of Director of the Office of Australian War Graves on 11 January 2019, replacing Ken Corke. Paul has over 30 years' experience in the Australian Army and was most recently the Deputy Commander Joint Task Force 633 in the Middle East.
- Recently retired Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army, Warrant Officer Don Spinks AM, joined the Department as a member of the Repatriation Commission on 4 February 2019.
- Dr Jenny Firman has been appointed as the Chief Health Officer from 25 February 2019, replacing Dr Ian Gardner who will retire effective from 1 July 2019. Jenny previously worked in the Office of Health Protection and is a Rear Admiral in the Navy Reserves.

3.2. Complaints & Feedback Management

3.2.1 Feedback Management System reports for the past three financial years and 2018/19 to 8 March 2019:

National	2015/16	%	2016/17	%	2017/18	%	2018/19	%
							YTD	
Complaints	2,304	76.3	2,866	75	2,473	68.7	1,442	59.2
Compliments	716	23.7	960	25	1,127	31.3	993	40.8
Total Feedback	3,020		3,826		3,600		2,435	

3.3 Veteran Card

3.3.1 The Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant encouraging Australia to recognise and acknowledge the unique nature of military service, and employers, businesses and community organisations to support veterans and their families, is underpinned by a new Veteran Card, an Australian Veteran Lapel Pin and a Reservist Lapel Pin. Applicants new to DVA can create a MyService account and a request for a Veteran Card.

3.3.2 Ms Jolley commented on her experience in applying via MyService, with an unsuccessful initial application in October as she didn't have a PMKeys number and entry of a Service Number at that time was not available (as noted by Mr King), and being unable to easily upload evidence due to the format of service documents at the time. Recognising the difficulty, the option of photographing documents was suggested. A subsequent application in February resulted in the issue of a White Card, soon to be replaced by the new Veteran Card.

3.3.3 Responding to a question from Mr Wills, Mr White confirmed that the Lapel Pins would be issued to eligible veterans and reservists only, not to widows or other family members.

3.4 2018 Client Satisfaction Survey

3.4.1 The results of the 2018 Client Satisfaction Survey were released by the Minister on 6 December 2018 and published on the DVA website. The results show overall satisfaction with DVA has reduced slightly from 83% in 2016 to 81%. Early analysis shows that the overall drop in satisfaction is driven by a small decline in satisfaction among the 65 years plus client group (from 92% to 89%). Due to the size of this demographic, the drop masks improved satisfaction ratings for the two younger cohorts - 45–64 years up 3% to 72%, and the under-45 years up 9% to 58%.

3.4.2 Dissatisfaction has also reduced from 8% in 2016 to 6% in 2018. The under 45 years age group again shows the greatest improvement, almost halving the dissatisfaction rate of 31% in 2016 to 15%.

3.5 Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service

3.5.1 On 14 December 2018, the Minister announced the establishment of a Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service to advise on high-level and complex strategic matters relating to women and families impacted by defence service. The Council's operating arrangements are being developed.

3.6 Gold Card for SEATO personnel

3.6.1 On 16 December 2018, it was announced that eligibility for a DVA Gold Card for a small number of members of the civilian surgical and medical teams employed by the then Department of External Affairs in Vietnam as part of a Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation aid program between 1964 and 1972 would take effect from 1 July 2020, subject to enabling legislation.

3.7 Provisional Access to Medical Treatment trial

3.7.1 Since the first significant improvements to data-sharing with Defence in December 2016, more than 15,000 new, re-joining and separated personnel have been registered with DVA through the Early Engagement Model. Data from this cohort has been used to design the Provisional Access to Medical Treatment trial which commenced in July 2018.

3.7.2 Under this trial, for the top 20 claimed conditions, veterans do not have to establish liability before accessing necessary treatment. As at 8 March, 4,737 veterans were registered on the trial which has been extended to run to 30 September 2019.

3.8 MyService

3.8.1 The number of veterans using MyService continues to rise steadily and, as at 7 February, had 53,305 users and had received 21,146 claims. Almost half of all MRCA Initial Liability claims lodged through this digital channel.

3.8.2 On 21 January 2019, MyService was updated to incorporate a number of improvements and features to expand the services available online, including the ability to submit claims for Incapacity Payments, to upload further documentation after submitting an Initial Liability claim, to register for the Veteran Card, and to link to a page to book car transport or request travel reimbursement. The March MyService release includes a range of minor improvements for users including an expansion of proof of identity types when registering, clarifying support available to current serving members, and improving functionality in users profile.

3.9 Productivity Commission Inquiry

3.9.1 The Productivity Commission released the draft report of its inquiry into compensation and rehabilitation for veterans, titled “A Better Way to Support Veterans”, on 14 December 2018. The draft report, containing 48 recommendations, 20 findings and 17 calls for further information, proposes a substantial and broad program of reform and major changes to long-standing and fundamental aspects of the current system.

3.9.2 The Commission has called for a second round of post-draft submissions and is conducting public hearings in February and early March 2019 in all capital cities, as well as Townsville and Wagga Wagga. The final report to Government is due at the end of June 2019. Further information on the inquiry is available on the Productivity Commission’s website.

3.10 Annual GP Health Assessment

3.10.1 From 1 July 2019, separating ADF members will be able to access an annual comprehensive health assessment by a general practitioner for the first five years post-discharge to assist in the early detection and treatment of mental and physical health concerns during a member’s transition to civilian life, which research has found is a risk period for the emergence of mental health conditions and suicide.

3.11 Community Grants Hub

3.11.1 On-line applications for 2019-20 grants open in March for BEST and Grants In Aid, and in July for Supporting Younger Veterans. The first online batch of Saluting Their Service – Major Commemorative Grants was approved by the Minister on 6 December 2018, with the second round of applications closed on 10 January 2019. In preparation for the opening of 2019–20 grant rounds, grant administration processes are being reviewed, in concert with the Hub, to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

3.12 Coordinated Veterans’ Care Mental Health Pilot

3.12.1 The Coordinated Veterans’ Care Mental Health Pilot is available to eligible cardholders with mild to moderate anxiety or depression and a musculo-skeletal condition requiring pain management. The pilot will test whether the use of a digital coaching app can help participants to better manage their health, build resilience and improve overall wellbeing. The app is a short-term intervention taking participants an average of six to eight weeks to complete, with a new session available every few days.

3.12.2 The pilot is recruiting participants in rural and regional areas in Queensland, New South Wales (North Coast, Hunter, New England and Central Coast, South Eastern, and Murrumbidgee), Victoria and Tasmania. Veterans interested in participating have until 31 March 2019 to enrol with Tunstall Healthcare (telephone 1800 424 514).

4. Presentations

4.1 Treatment Cycle Initiative

4.1.1 Dr Firman tabled a paper outlining the Treatment Cycle initiative, a one-year trial commencing 1 July 2019 intended to better align allied health services with evidence-based best practice. Under the trial, patients requiring more than 12 treatments or treatment in excess of 12 months, will be reviewed by the General Practitioner (GP) to ensure treatment is clinically appropriate and effective. While there is no limit to the number of treatment cycles a patient may undergo, the initiative provides:

- Improved treatment planning and regular review of progress by GPs and allied health providers;
- Better communication between a client's allied health provider and their GP;
- Strengthened continuity of care and clinical accountability; and
- Ensures DVA clients get the most effective form of treatment for their needs.

4.1.2 Members supported the aims of the trial, noting the value in coordination of services and regular review by the GP. Responding to a question from Mr Wills, Ms Buck acknowledged that transition arrangements were being considered and would need to be widely communicated.

4.2 Transformation Showcase

4.2.1 Assistant Secretary Portfolio & Transformation, Matt McKeon, provided an update on transformation initiatives including the 1800 Veteran number and other communication channel initiatives, issue of the White Card on transition, issue of the Veteran Card, online students' claims and service pension claim facilities, and future possibilities through the better capture and use of data (providing examples such as being able to read audiograms and target screening for early diagnoses). Mr McKeon advised the issue of the new Veteran Card from next week and the current status of third parties taking on Veteran Recognition activities.

4.2.2 Project Lead Mark Travers provided MyService demonstrations of a Veteran Card request and progress with online Service Pension claims, scheduled to go live late next financial year, as well as noting amendments (inclusion of the transport request tab) and upcoming features (ability to add relationships, expected from June 2019).

4.3.2 Members again expressed their appreciation for the Transformation update.

4.3 ACT Advisory Council

4.3.1 Ms Jolley provided an overview of the ACT Veterans' Advisory Council and its major aims in the areas of recognition/commemoration, communication and education, with consultation with ACT Veterans undertaken through 2019. A number of initiatives were flagged, including a Veterans' Day at Floriade and a possible veterans' Day at the National Arboretum, lighting of the ACT Peace Memorial near the Legislative Assembly building during *Enlighten*, and working with the ACT Government and others in maintaining commemorative sites.

4.3.2 In response to a question from LTCOL Bienkiewicz, Ms Jolley confirmed that veteran priority for community housing was under discussion. Responding to Mr King, she was also able to confirm all ACT Government employment forms included an option for applicants to identify as having had ADF service.

4.3.3 Mrs Jolley also reminded Members that small grant applications up to \$2,000 were still available, and that the next round of larger grants (to \$10,000) would open in the new financial year, noting that sponsoring arrangements were required for the War Widows' Guild to make grant applications as the Guild did not carry their own insurance coverage.

4.4 **Open Arms**

4.4.1 Via videoconference, Matthew McGuinness, Director Open Arms NSW/ACT, advised that the new Open Arms premises at Level 1, 14 Furzer Street, Phillip, would open on 18 March, noting that an official opening had not yet been scheduled, but inviting Members to attend and view the facility.

4.4.2 Mr McGuinness also advised of the introduction of tele-counselling services (which may be supplemented by face-to-face counselling), piloted in the ACT during 2018 and the possible roll-out of tele-counselling options to other sites. Responding to a question from Ms Jolley, Mr McGuinness noted the significant reduction in wait times in the ACT, but confirmed that, at around 6-8 weeks, wait times were still longer than other jurisdictions. Acknowledging a high demand and an arguable scarcity of providers, Mr McGuinness also noted arrangements with Relationships Australia for the provision of couples and family counselling, and the recruitment of two new positions that will further improve access. Mr McGuinness reminded Members that clients are triaged and counselling is expedited as required.

5. **General Business**

5.1 **War Widow Claim Acknowledgement Letters**

5.1.1 Mr Wills, while acknowledging advice letters have been much improved, was of the view that statements such as "next time you log onto your MyAccount" and advice on how to create an account, was unfriendly, confuses older widows and that it was often irrelevant as clients must be registered with DVA before they can create an account.

5.1.5 Use of headings and a pamphlet style of information was suggested.

5.2 **Letters to Recently Deceased Clients**

5.2.1 Mr Wills provided an example of a letter sent to a deceased client that had upset the widow. The letter, dated 26 February 2019 advised that, "DVA is committed to supporting you to live a full and healthy life and as a person living with diabetes, DVA hopes that you get a significant benefit." The veteran died on 10 December and DVA finalised bereavement actions on 12 December 2018.

5.2.2 The Director Care & Assistance Program sub-section of Client Engagement & Support Services is investigating and will respond out-of-session.

5.3 **ACT VAN Office**

5.3.1 Mr Wills advised that Legacy receive many complaints about a lack of nearby parking to the ACT VAN office. In response, Ms Daniells confirmed the availability of free parking, including level ground access from the David Jones store carpark. Mr Wills acknowledged the convenience of having Centrelink, Medicare, Taxation and other government services in close proximity.

5.4 **Telephony**

5.4.1 Members were reminded of telephony upgrades advised on 6 March, with DVA gradually introducing a new 'open speech' service where callers will be able to 'Tell DVA' why they are calling. Initially only a very small portion of callers will experience this technology (5% of calls to DVA's main veteran phone line, which is about 200 calls a day).

5.4.2 These callers will hear a message asking them to say why they are calling, before they make a keypad selection from the usual menu of options. As DVA captures enquiries and works out how best to direct them, more and more calls will be directed through to the right area of DVA without the need to use the phone keypad. If there are any issues during these phone calls, they will be re-directed through to a staff member for assistance.

5.4.3 As capability to implement this technology is built, the percentage of callers given access to 'Tell DVA' will be expanded. Further enhancements will be introduced throughout 2019, including the option for callers to request a call back at a time that suits and the opportunity to provide feedback via a post-call survey.

5.4.4 Feedback may be provided by emailing AMBERT@dva.gov.au or calling DVA's general enquiries line on 1800 555 254.

5.5 **War Widows' Guild**

5.5.1 Ms Mitchell informed the Forum of action underway to improve member communications. The Guild is developing a database of War Widows' or a family member's email address with the intent of more regular advice on social meetings and issue of a three-monthly newsletter. Ms Mitchell also noted memoranda of understanding being developed for ongoing support from Canberra Legacy and their office at Barton, as well as ongoing insurance issues with grant applications.

5.6 **The Returned & Services League of Australia**

5.6.1 Mr King provided an update on planning for the ANZAC Day march and review of governance and compliance issues, stressing the preparedness of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) to work with organisations and encouraging others to review arrangements and contact the ACNC if required. Mr King also commented on membership numbers, noting that while two sub-branches had merged late last year, others were experience an increase in new members, particularly those based near Defence housing.

5.7 **Defence Force Welfare Association**

5.6.1 LTCOL Bienkiewicz tabled a paper outlining current issues, noting submissions to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee inquiry into the Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Bill 2019, and the Productivity Commission's draft report into Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans - A Better Way to Support Veterans, with will be submitted by 15 March and uploaded to the DFWA website.

5.8 **Veterans Support Centre Belconnen**

5.8.1 CMDR Gainey noted a membership base of around 400, outlined advocate and welfare officer workloads, and noted recent successful grant applications.

5.9 **Canberra Legacy**

5.9.1 Mr Wills noted that Legacy has been successfully recruiting legatees and outlined upcoming activities, expressing particular pleasure with widows being included in the ANZAC Day march.

5.10 **Resources**

5.10.1 Mr White reminded Members of the availability of the 2019 ANZAC Day poster recognising Australian Service Nursing and the education resource, Reflections: Capturing Veterans' Stories, and sought assistance in encouraging entries in the ANZAC Day Schools' Awards with entries closing 24 May 2019.

5.10.2 Members were also advised of the RSL & Services Clubs NSW "Respect the Day" campaign designed to educate young people and newer Australians about the purpose and focus of Anzac Day. Imagery, available at no cost to ex-service and associated organisations, is available by contacting Garrie Gibson, Chief Executive Officer, at GarrieG@rslservicesclubs.com.au.

6. **Next Meeting**

6.1 Members were reminded that a Budget briefing would be held for the ex-service community on Wednesday, 3 April.

6.2 The next meeting is scheduled for 1030, Wednesday, 31 July 2019.

7. **Meeting Close**

7.1 The Chair closed the meeting at 12:55pm.



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