

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S CONSULTATION FORUM - ACT
MINUTES OF THE 22nd MEETING
28 November 2018

Present

Mr Hadyn White – Executive Officer to the Deputy Commissioner (Chair/Secretary)

Mrs Robynne Mitchell – War Widows' Guild of Australia

Ms Pat McCabe OAM – Kindred Organisations Committee and TPI Association

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 Veterans Advisory Council

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 22nd meeting of the Deputy Commissioner's ACT Consultation Forum.

1.1.2 CMDR Ward Gainey joins the Forum as the new President of the Veterans' Support Centre Belconnen, replacing Mr Ian Thompson. CMDR Gainey served 29 years in the Royal Australian Navy, discharging in 1998.

1.1.3 Mr White advised that BRIG Alison Creagh CSC (Ret'd), Chair of the ACT Veterans Advisory Council, had been added as a member of the Forum. BRIG Creagh retired from the Australian Army in 2015 after 30 years' service, and continues to serve in the Army Reserve. She served on operations in Cambodia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.

1.1.4 Apologies were received from:

- Ms Maralyn Newman, Deputy Commissioner (DC) NSW/ACT, and acting DC, Mr Brent Morgan;
- Mr John King, The Returned & Services League of Australia;
- Mrs Annette Sadler, War Widows' Guild, represented by Mrs Robynne Mitchell;
- Mr Rob Connor, Canberra Legacy, represented by Mr Ian Wills;
- Mr Ian Thompson, ATDP Regional Manager Group 2;
- BRIG Alison Creagh CSC (Ret'd), ACT Veterans Advisory Council Chair, represented by Ms Elizabeth Jolley (ex-RAN); and
- Mr Matthew McGuinness, A/Director NSW/ACT Open Arms.

1.1.5 In acknowledging a member's achievement, Mr White provided a summary of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. Before the company was established in 1929, the future status of air pilots and navigators was in doubt. The Company was

modelled on the lines of the old City Guilds and Livery Companies, and became a Livery Company of the City of London in 1956 – a rarely bestowed mark of distinction and the 81st Livery Company to be formed in 800 years. The Company was granted a Royal Charter in 2014. In 1953, the Company assumed responsibility from the Air Ministry for the issue of the prestigious Master Air Pilot certificate and subsequently, Master Air Navigator and Master Rear Crew certificates.

- 1.1.6 Last month at an awards banquet in London, certificate number 1237 was awarded to Mr Ian Thompson – international recognition to “honour an aviator who has displayed over a number of years those qualities of pilotage, air navigation, airmanship and character which have brought honour and respect to the profession. As the title suggests, the recipient is a proven Master of their craft”.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Business Arising

- 2.1 Members confirmed the minutes of meeting 21 held on 22 August 2018.

3. Updates on Business Areas and Initiatives

3.1 Staffing Update

- 3.1.1 To continue our important work in transforming DVA and implementing the outcomes of reviews and inquiries, the Secretary has elevated the First Assistant Secretary (FAS) Transformation and Organisational Performance role to a Deputy Secretary position. Charles McHardie, currently acting CIO in the Department of Human Services, will commence in this role in January 2019. Charles is also a 30-year service Navy veteran.

- 3.1.2 At this commencement, Mark Cormack will assume the role of Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs which will include the Veterans' Services Design Division, Client Engagement and Support Services Division, Clients' Benefits Division and Legal, Assurance and Governance Division.

- 3.1.3 Craig Orme will continue to lead our capability building in the fields of data, research and engagement to support our new Wellbeing model to be proactive, predictive and preventive for our veterans and their families. 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 Feedback Management System reports for the past three financial years and 2018/19 to 23 November 2018:

National	2015/16	%	2016/17	%	2017/18	%	2018/19	%
Complaints	2,304	76.3	2,866	75	2,473	68.7	880	58.7
Compliments	716	23.7	960	25	1,127	31.3	618	41.3
Total Feedback	3,020		3,826		3,600		1,498	

3.3 Telephony Consolidation

3.3.1 The Telephony Consolidation Project continues to prepare DVA for the introduction of 1800 VETERAN to make it easier for clients to speak to the right person at the first point of contact. The Genesys telephony and workforce management systems are being implemented more broadly across telephone service delivery areas. A number of telephony support tools will be introduced in the coming months, including the Open Speech application for natural speech recognition; Place in Queue; Post-Call Survey; as well as further consolidation of telephone numbers and call queues.

3.4 Easy Access Face-to-Face Pilots

3.4.1 The Department of Human Services will continue Support for Veterans' Services via the Mobile Service Centres through to June 2019 – with enhancements to include increased community engagement and promotion of the DVA service offer and DVA branding. Desert Rose and Golden Wattle have so far visited more than 200 communities in 2018, providing more opportunities for veterans and their families to have face-to-face engagement in rural and regional areas across Australia.

3.4.2 Information Partnership pilots with the Australian War Memorial and Shrine of Remembrance (Melbourne) are continuing, and will test new brochures, currently in development. A further information partnership has been agreed by the head of the Australian Army History Unit, which runs the Australian Army's 18 museums. DVA brochures and contact cards will be displayed at all their locations.

3.5 Veteran and Military Mental Health Innovations in Treatment Practitioners Forum

3.5.1 This forum was held on 27–28 July and was the first practitioner engagement activity to be undertaken by the Practitioners Support Service. Minister Chester officially launched the Practitioners Support Service at this forum. More than 400 practitioners with an interest in veteran and military mental health attended the event over the two days.

3.6 Support for Veterans' Partners and Families

3.6.1 Following feedback from the Female Veterans and Veterans' Families Policy Forum, and in response to Recommendation 19 of the Suicide Inquiry, work is under way for a stocktake of services available across Australia to partners and families, both veteran-centric and mainstream, inclusive of domestic/family violence services. DVA will write to Australian Government agencies, state and territory governments, ex-service organisations and community sector organisations seeking their assistance in collating all relevant services in their jurisdictions. This will inform a larger research project in 2019 to assess the effectiveness of these services and new service design to ensure they address service gaps.

3.7 PTSD Guidelines

3.7.1 DVA, Defence and Health will co-fund Phoenix Australia to review and develop the new Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (the PTSD Guidelines). For the first time, the guidelines will be in a "living" format, which will be perpetually updated as new research and treatment practices become available. DVA and Defence have funded the development of the previous PTSD Guidelines which were released in 2007 and 2013. The guidelines are endorsed by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) as an internationally recognised guideline for best

practice in the treatment of stress related illness.

- 3.7.2 DVA provides the guidelines to referring clinicians as the standard requirements when developing mental health programs or treatment practices for patients suffering from acute or post-traumatic stress. The guidelines are also used as the standard to align DVA's mental health and treatment programs with best practice.

3.8 **Webinar Series**

- 3.8.1 The ninth webinar in the series is scheduled for 3 December. The topic is, "A snapshot of Australian veterans' mental health research: Important insights for clinical practice".

3.9 **Refurbishment and safety works at the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum, Thailand**

- 3.9.1 Refurbishment and safety works at the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum, included essential safety and maintenance work to accommodate the significant number of visitors who visit the commemorative site. The Museum has now re-opened.

3.10. **Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant, Card and Lapel Pin**

- 3.10.1 On 27 October 2018, the Government announced the Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant, a public pledge to support veterans and their families. Launching in April next year, the Government will enact the Covenant in legislation and Australians will be encouraged to take the pledge at community commemorative events, such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

- 3.10.2 Underpinning the Covenant will be a new Australian Veteran Card and Lapel Pin to provide a way for the public to recognise and connect with current and former ADF personnel. The card will also identify all those who have served, so that their contribution can be universally recognised by the community, governments, organisations, businesses and individuals. A project board comprising the Deputy President, First Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Commissioners, branch heads and government partners, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, is meeting regularly to ensure the successful implementation of all aspects of this project.

3.11 **2017-18 Annual Report**

- 3.11.1 The DVA, Repatriation Commission and Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission 2017-18 Annual Report was tabled in Parliament on 19 October 2018. The report is available at <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-dva/accountability-and-reporting/annual-reports/annual-reports-2017-18>.

4. **Presentation**

4.1 **Transformation Showcase**

- 4.1.1 With assistance from Emma Agnew, Executive Director Justin Mein provided an overview of DVA's Transformation achievements and current initiatives. Project Lead, Mark Travers, provided a demonstration of upcoming MyService/MyAccount initiatives with ability to advise Nominated Representative and lodge a claim for Incapacity Payments.

- 4.1.2 Members discussed a range of issues for Transformation consideration, including telephony, local service provision and support for ex-service organisations, transition support (particularly in preparing people to adjust from being institutionalised), and the practicality in aged veterans accessing online services.

5. General Business

5.1 Carer Allowance

5.1.1 In relation to changed Centrelink requirements for continuation of Carer Allowance eligibility, Ms McCabe raised cases of differences in policy interpretations being applied to Special Rate (TPI) pensioners, advising that the matter had been referred to DVA without resolution. While a Department of Human Services' requirement, Ms McCabe felt DVA should take ownership of all veteran's issues.

5.2 Hearing Aids

5.2.1 Ms McCabe referred to DVA Hearing Services Factsheets that advised entitlement to partially or fully subsidised hearing aids, an issue sometimes used by providers to coerce veterans into purchasing more featured aids. Mr White tabled revised DVA Factsheet HSV22 – Hearing Services, and Factsheet HIP121 – Providers – Hearing Services for Veterans, that no longer reference partial subsidy. An article suitable for ESO newsletters has been circulated by Ms McCabe.

5.3 Advocacy Issues

5.3.1 Mr Wills provided details of a War Widows' claim that, while received electronically, had not been registered some seven weeks after submission. The matter has been registered as a formal complaint (reference FMS-40110) and is awaiting resolution.

5.3.2 While noting improved quality of claim receipt acknowledgement letters to clients, Mr Wills noted that the statement of DVA contact to provide additional information should indicated provision through the client's representative, where appointed. Similarly, the invitation to email questions is not applicable to many widows and alternative options should be provided.

5.3.3 For widows' claims, Mr Wills also noted continuing difficulties in contacting DVA to establish the veteran's claimed conditions.

5.4 Telephone Contact

5.4.1 Mr Wills noted problems telephoning DVA, which he often does several times a day, usually with a 10-minute minimum wait time. This concern, and problems contacting the Canberra VAN service, had been raised with Director Kim Daniells, and were discussed during the Transformation Showcase.

5.4.2 Mr White, noting that the service level target is to answer 70% of calls within 60 seconds, confirmed that temporary closure of the Townsville Office and announcement of the Veteran Card had negatively impacted current performance but strategies were in place to improve service.

5.5 Review of ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria

5.5.1 Mr Wills tabled a letter from Canberra Legacy to the ACT Government expressing concern with a current review and consideration of recycling graves by limiting tenure. Members noted that the proposal was not well publicised and, given the availability of land in the ACT, difficult to rationalise. Legacy's letter notes that, "The ability of families to physically commemorate the sacrifices of our veterans in perpetuity is a right that should not be taken away". Submissions close 10 December 2018.

5.6 Defence Force Welfare Association

- 5.6.1 LTCOL Bienkiewicz tabled a paper listing DFWA current concerns:
- Inclusion of the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation into the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry;
 - The proposed Veterans Covenant;
 - The “economic loss” component of Special Rate pension and taxation of invalidity benefits;
 - Military superannuation indexation, access to preserved benefits and DFRDB commutation;
 - Veteran suicide and homelessness; and
 - The future of Ex-Service Organisations.

5.7 ACT Grants

- 5.7.1 Mrs Jolley advised that small grant applications (up to \$2,000) would be invited early in 2019.

5.8 Infographics

- 5.8.1 Members noted tabled State/Territory infographics covering 2017/18.

6. Next Meeting

- 6.1 The proposed meeting scheduled for 2019, with venue to be confirmed, is:
- 10:30, Wednesday, 13 March 2019;
 - 1030, Wednesday, 31 July 2019; and
 - 1030, Wednesday, 30 October 2019.
- 6.2 Members were also reminded that a Budget briefing would be held for the ex-service community, noting that the Government had announced that the 2019 Budget would be delivered on 2 April 2019.

7. Meeting Close

- 7.1 Mr White closed the meeting at 12:45pm.



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