



**Minutes**

Members	
Mr Don Spinks AM (Chair)	Repatriation Commissioner
COL James Burns	ADF Liaison Officer to DVA, Department of Defence
Mr Kris Milne	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Mr Bradley Campbell	Australian Veterans Alliance
Ms Michelle Hoare	Defence Families of Australia
Mr Marc Diplock	Mates4Mates
Mr James Dallas	Returned and Services League of Australia
Mr Doug Sheridan (proxy)	Soldier On
Mr John Newton	Australian Special Air Service Association
Ms Talissa Papamau	Modern Soldier
CMDR Mark Fullick RAN	Naval Association of Australia
Mr Chris Tilley	Royal Australian Regiment Association
Mr Scott Harris	The Warrior's Return (WR)
Apologies	
Ms Barbara Boyer	Legacy Australia Inc
Mr John Hardgrave	Soldier On
SQNLDR Dee Cherry	Air Force Association
TBC	Defence Force Welfare Association

**Agenda Item 1** Welcome and Meeting Administration

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and noted apologies from Ms Barbara Boyer, **Legacy**, SQDLDR Dee Cherry, **Air Force Association**, and Mr John Hardgraves, **Soldier On**. The Chair welcomed Mr Hardgraves' proxy, Mr Doug Sheridan. Members noted that the **Defence Force Welfare Association** representative is yet to be announced.

The Chair advised members that in line with recent announcements by Minister Gee a consultation session with McKinsey and Co has been arranged as part of their Claims Diagnostic Review.

**Agenda item 2** Minutes and Action Items

The Minutes of the previous meeting held 23 June 2021 were **ENDORSED**.

Members **AGREED** to close the following Actions Items as listed in the paper Y2020/0166, Y2021/009 and, Y2021/022.



## Younger Veterans - Contemporary Needs Forum

Wednesday 3 November 2021

GovTeams

10:30am – 1:30pm AEDT

Members **NOTED** the following Action Items remain open, Y2021/167, Y2021/69, Y2021/01, Y2021/04, Y2021/05, Y2021/06, Y2021/18, Y2021/19, Y2021/20, and Y2021/21.

### Agenda Item 3 Departmental Update

The Chair welcomed Acting Deputy Secretary, Ms Veronica Hancock. Ms Hancock provided members a summary of the current DVA strategic priorities, Budget measures and the subsequent priority areas for the Minister and Department in the next 12 months. Noting the continued focus on reducing the Claims backlog and streamlining departmental processes members discussed possible mechanisms to manage expectations of claims processing times.

Members sought advice on the release of BEST grant funding.

No.	Action / Decision	Assigned to
<b>Y2021/0</b>	Secretariat to provide advice to members on release of 2021/22 BEST grant funding.	Secretariat

### Agenda Item 4 Open Arms – Update

The Chair introduced Ms Jennifer Veitch, Assistant National Manager, Open Arms- Veterans & Families Counselling (Open Arms) to provide Members an update on Open Arms activities.

Ms Veitch advised members of the establishment of a new Division within DVA; Mental Health and Wellbeing Services, incorporating Open Arms.

Members noted that the new Division brings together Open Arms and Coordinated Client Support together to facilitate faster response times and better outcomes for clients. Ms Veitch strove to confirm that Open Arms will remain separate from DVA and provide complementary services.

Members discussed challenges for veterans and their families to access mental health services, particularly during trauma. Ms Veitch acknowledged that more does need to be done and spoke to work being done to establish a peer network and provide more information and resources on the Open Arms web page.

Members noted Mr James Dallas', Returned and Services League of Australia, advice on the establishment of the Nowra Wellbeing Centre. Mr Dallas also undertook to share updates with members as the Wagga Wagga Wellbeing Centre develops.

### Agenda Item 5 Member Submission - SA Department for Correctional Services' (DCS) Veteran Staff, Prisoners and Offenders Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025

The Chair invited Mr Chris Tilley, Royal Australian Regiment Association, to speak to his submission outlining the South Australian Department of Correctional Services Prisoners and Offenders Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025.

Members noted the intended focus on partnerships and pathways to support veterans in the criminal justice system.

Mr Tilley undertook to provide members with further updates as the strategy is implemented.

Members also noted the DVA research project being undertaken in partnership with Flinders University, to better understand the experiences of ex-service Australian Defence Force personnel in corrective service systems.



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No.	Action / Decision	Assigned to
Y2021/0	Mr Tilley to provide YVF members an update on implementation of the SA Department for Correctional Services' (DCS) Veteran Staff, Prisoners and Offenders Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025 at future YVF meeting.	Mr Chris Tilley

### Agenda Item 6 Simplifying Disability Pension and Increasing Access to Rent Assistance

The Chair introduced Ms Adrienne Godsmark, Director Policy Implementation to advise the members of the implementation of a Budget Measure to simplify the Disability Pension and increase access to rent assistance.

Members noted the measure will take effect from 1 January 2022 and that letters will be distributed to affected clients.

Members called for clear communications around this, noting potential impacts on circumstances such as applications for home loans where this payment should be considered as income.

### Agenda Item 7 Client Satisfaction Survey

The Chair introduced Ms Jennifer Hamer, Director Strategic Policy. Ms Hamer advised members of the impending release of the 2021 Client Satisfaction Survey.

Members noted the importance of the survey results in improving DVA's services to veterans and their families. Members also noted the results from the 202 survey were available on the DVA website and asked if there is a difference in user experience between new and existing clients. Ms Hamer advised that client satisfaction does seem to differ depending on which end of the client service spectrum a client is interacting. Typically those within the client process and with needs addressed show greater satisfaction than the transitioning/new client having to navigate through the CVA client process.

Members were asked to encourage their members to participate in the study if contacted by DVA.

### Agenda Item 8 Address from Veteran's Families Advocate Commissioner (AI Y2020/0166)

The Chair introduced Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, Ms Gwen Cherne.

Members noted Commissioner Cherne's recent work in exploring and addressing issues that relate to veterans and their families including domestic violence and support for carers of veterans.

Members discussed narratives around domestic violence, noting a lack of support services available to males experiencing domestic violence.

### Agenda Item 9 Update on Claims Processing and Measures to Address Backlog

The Chair introduced Deputy Commissioner NSW/ACT, Ms Victoria Benz to update members on work being done to address the claims backlog.

Ms Benz reiterated the importance of claims processing as a leading priority for both the Minister and DVA. Ms Benz noted the work on recruitment and retention of staff since the 2021 Budget announcements, advising the comprehensive training and coaching process for all new staff.

Members queried the effectiveness of retention measures, noting potential turnover of contracted staff. Ms Benz acknowledged the difficulty in retaining contracted staff, and advised that a number of previously



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held contractor roles have been converted to non-ongoing APS roles for a period of 12 months, with possible extension.

Noting the potential expertise in the ex-service community, members asked if the veteran cohort could be employed as delegates. Ms Benz acknowledged the value of ex-service members and advised that DVA welcomes applications from ex-serving members

### [Agenda Item 10](#)      [Other Business](#)

Members noted the response to a query raised by Mr John Newton, **Australian Special Air Service Association**, clarifying a perceived discrepancy in Disability Pension figures cited in the April 2021 edition of VetAffairs.

The meeting closed at 1.43pm. Date of the next meeting will be advised.

ENDORSED