



## Minutes

### Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting acknowledging country, veterans, current serving Australian Defence Force Personnel and families. Members **NOTED** there were no conflicts of interest raised and **NOTED** apologies and attendees as listed at Annexure A.

### Agenda Item 2 Previous Minutes & Actions

Members **ENDORSED** the Minutes from the 28 February 2023 meeting.

Members **AGREED** to close Action items 2023OWP/A1, 2023OWP/A2, 2023OWP/A3, 2023OWP/A4, 2023OWP/A5, 2023OWP/A6 and 2023OWP/A7.

Members were provided an update on Action item 2022OWP/A25 and **NOTED** the complexities of aged care and the need to communicate more broadly. Members **AGREED** to close Action item 2022OWP/A25 while ensuring there is a focus on investigating the best way to communicate to different cohorts.

No.	Action	
2023OWP/A8	Business area to investigate with Communications Branch different channels of communication for different cohorts in the ex-service community regarding aged care.	Program Delivery
2023OWP/A9	Access to aged care report from The Royal Australian Regiment Association to be submitted to ESORT.	Secretariat

Members **DISCUSSED** the Department's plan for a Veteran and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and **NOTED** the NCF Forums will be invited to comment.

### Agenda Item 2.1 2023OWP/A4 – Report back: MRCA & Aged Care Income and Assets Assessment

Members were provided an update on 2023OWP/A4 and **NOTED** the complexities involved with manifest eligibility and the need to discuss further with Services Australia, which is the owner of the instrument due to its assessment of the disability pension. Members **AGREED** to close Action item 2023OWP/A4 with further actions and offline discussions to occur.

Members **DISCUSSED** the Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP) and change in process that has occurred. Members **NOTED** the importance of ensuring that veterans are aware of the conditions of offer with SRDP. Members **AGREED** that the current letter and email needs to be reviewed by the Communications Branch and Chief Counsel prior to being circulated to OWP members.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A10	DVA to discuss with Services Australia the ability to change/amend its instrument regarding the Aged Care Income Assets Assessment.	Client Benefits
2023OWP/A11	DVA to discuss offline with TPI Federation and Australian War Widows representatives about SRDP, MRCA & Aged Care Income Assets Assessment and war widow compensation as income.	Client Benefits
2023OWP/A12	Out of session paper on SRDP to be circulated to OWP members regarding the complaints received, what the new email and letter	Client Benefits

	entails, details on number of veterans eligible for SRDP and how many received 50 points to determine scale of affected individuals. DVA to review its website to ensure correct information is provided.	
<b>2023OWP/A13</b>	Item to be placed on November 2023 OWP meeting agenda regarding Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP).	<b>Secretariat</b>

### Agenda Item 3 Advocacy Reform Update

Members were updated and **NOTED** that DVA is continuing work with the Ex-Service Organisation Roundtable (ESORT) to consider ways of supporting claims assistance for veterans and families, with the establishment of a working group to develop principles and standards for claims assistance for veterans and their families.

Members **NOTED** the working group aims to agree on the principles and standards expected of Advocates assisting veterans and their families, and will report back to ESORT at its September 2023 meeting.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of having a consistent and professional level of support to veterans seeking claims assistance and **NOTED** the need to continue updating the Advocate Training and Development Program (ATDP) and offerings within.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned to</b>
<b>2023OWP/A14</b>	Provide an email address to OWP members to enable any comments or feedback on Advocacy.	<b>Secretariat</b>

### Agenda Item 4 Veterans' and Families' Hubs

Members **NOTED** the update and **DISCUSSED** the expansion of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs network beyond the six established hubs. Members **NOTED** progress that has been made and how this will support the veteran community.

### Agenda Item 5 Medical Forms Review Project Update

Members received an update on the work underway in the Medical Forms Review Project to consolidate the number of forms used and streamline processes to prepare for a digitised environment. Members **NOTED** a taskforce has been established to accelerate the delivery of updated forms by early 2024.

Members **NOTED** the progress to date and that final versions of the revised forms will be placed on the DVA website in tranches. Members were encouraged to provide any feedback, including on those forms already completed, via email to Sally Dennington via [sally.dennington@dva.gov.au](mailto:sally.dennington@dva.gov.au).

#### Agenda Item 5.1 Thoracolumbar Spondylosis – New SOP

Members **NOTED** the update provided on the new Statement of Principles (SOP) for Thoracolumbar Spondylosis. Members **DISCUSSED** that existing conditions will remain in place and **NOTED** the changes that have occurred.

### Agenda Item 6 Travel Entitlements: Rate of Reimbursement for use of Private Vehicle

Members **NOTED** the information provided on travel for treatment, acknowledging there are differences more broadly in travel rates across DVA's legislation. Members **DISCUSSED** their concerns regarding 'closest practical provider' and **NOTED** the complexities and inconsistencies between the Acts.

Members **NOTED** there have been calls to apply the more generous features under each of the schemes to all veterans, and this issue will form part of the advice DVA is providing to the Government about how it might implement its proposed pathway. Along with the other changes proposed, this would need to be considered in the Budget context.

### Agenda Item 7 Differences between Household Services and Veterans Home Care

Members **NOTED** the update and **DISCUSSED** the differences in services available through Veterans Home Care (VHC) and Household Services are due to the different legislative intents and underpinning principles of the programs. Members **NOTED** the consultation process has just been completed seeking views from veterans and their families about establishing an improved version of the MRCA as the sole ongoing scheme.

### Agenda Item 8 Legislative Reform Pathway Update

Members **NOTED** the update on the proposed Legislation Reform Pathway and that the Government is working towards the timeframe outlined in the Royal Commission's Interim Report of having new legislation operational by 1 July 2025 and **NOTED** that another round of consultation is likely to take place on an exposure draft in early 2024.

#### Agenda Item 8.1 Grandfathering of VEA

Members **NOTED** the update on Grandfathering and the differences in how compensation is paid under the MRCA and the VEA. Members **DISCUSSED** the supports and services provided to entitled veterans and their families are overwhelmingly similar.

### Agenda Item 9 Modernisation Update

Members **NOTED** the update and that DVA will continue to provide ongoing improvement to deliver efficient claims processing services to the veteran community before June 2024. Members were advised the Advocacy Support 1300 phone number will be decommissioned and new 1800 numbers have been introduced.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A15	Investigate where the 1300 number has been diverted to and provide advice that can be distributed through members/ESO's advocacy networks.	Chief Information Officer
2023OWP/A16	Advice to be provided on the possibility/feasibility for messaging to be put on DVA website regarding "speak to an Advocate first".	Client Benefits
2023OWP/A17	Investigation into the use of generic email boxes for standard items.	Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience

### Agenda Item 10 Claims Processing Update

Members received an update on the claims backlog and **NOTED** the increase in staff engaged to reduce the backlog in Initial Liability (IL) cases. Members **DISCUSSED** advice that the time to process will continue to reduce based on productivity improvements and that application rate has stabilised. Members also discussed investigation into considering ex-service injury/illness claims before serving claims.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A18	Come back to OWP in November 2023 with a spreadsheet on confirmed claims that have been finalised.	Client Benefits
2023OWP/A19	Air Force Association member invited to provide a list of claims to Client Benefits that are of concern.	Air Force Association

#### Agenda Item 10.1 Multi-Act Assessment

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member's submission.

#### Agenda Item 10.2 Criterion For Escalation To Have Claim Considered Urgently

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member's submission.

### Agenda Item 11 DFRDB & MSBS Invalidity Pension Definition

Members **NOTED** the update on the Douglas decision, and Schedule 9 of the Treasury Laws Amendment (2022 Measures No. 4) Bill 2022 do not impact provisions requiring offset of Commonwealth-funded superannuation from incapacity payments under the DRCA and MRCA. Members **DISCUSSED** concerns regarding the impact of the Douglas decision and the viability of offsetting superannuation belongs to the individual, not the Commonwealth.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A20	TPI Federation representative to write an email with the details of definitions to ensure they are correct and provide to DVA to receive a departmental response.	TPI Federation and Policy & Research

### Agenda Item 12 Hearing Services for Veterans

Members **NOTED** the update on Hearing Services and that DVA continues to look at opportunities to improve hearing services for veterans. Members **DISCUSSED** the complex needs of veterans and how DVA could provide timely decisions that align with the wellbeing framework.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A21	Provide OWP members with a copy of the criteria/form to determine clinical needs for hearing devices. Business area to report back on "how you determine clinical need".	Program Delivery
2023OWP/A22	Information to be provided to DVA from the Returned & Services League of Australia representative on instances where the delegate approves hearing aids, however, subsequently the relevant state does not provide funding.	Returned & Services League of Australia

### Agenda Item 13 Other business

The Royal Australian Regiment Association representative raised concerns around medical attention and those not residing in the location of the treating specialist. Members **NOTED** there are no real definitions under this legislation for normal treating doctor and they are developing a practice for claim reports.

Mr Graeme Bland, representative of the Air Force Association Ltd advised the Chair and OWP members that he would be resigning from his role and will no longer be a member of OWP. The Chair thanked Mr Bland for his contribution to the forum.

### Agenda Item 14 Wholly Dependent Partner/Defence Widow

Members **NOTED** the information provided on the legislative basis for the terms describing partners' compensation, and it was **NOTED** the concerns around the revised wording being unclear that you are a widow/widower. Members **AGREED** that the departmental response covered the submission and **NOTED** that advice will be provided around the wording that will appear on cards.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2023OWP/A23	DVA to review what wording in relation to Wholly Dependent Partner/Defence Widow that will appear on any DVA cards.	Policy & Research

### Agenda Item 15 Authority to Act

Members raised concerns regarding the amount of forms that are required to be completed to become a nominated representative of a veteran, and **NOTED** the work currently happening in the information access space. Members **NOTED** the departmental response that was provided on the topic.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
<b>2023OWP/A24</b>	DVA to look into the right process and required forms for nominated veteran representatives and gaining information when an individual has been given the Authority to Act.	<b>Client Benefits</b>

#### **Agenda Item 16 Unprofessional Correspondence**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member's submission.

#### **Agenda Item 17 Client Benefit Survey and address usage**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member's submission.

#### **Agenda Item 18 Suspect Scam**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and **AGREED** it addressed the Member's submission.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
<b>2023OWP/A25</b>	Advice to be provided on an alternative solution, if applicable, for members who regularly face issues when accessing the DVA secure email network.	<b>Veteran, Family &amp; Stakeholder Experience</b>

#### **Agenda Item 19 Australian Physiotherapy Association DVA Campaign for Higher Fees**

Members **NOTED** the departmental response and the current focus placed on the issue and **AGREED** it addressed the members submission.

**The meeting closed at 2:35pm**

<b>MEMBERS/ATTENDEES</b>	
Ms Kate Pope PSM (Chair)	Deputy Secretary, Veterans and Families Services Group
Ms Natasha Cole (Deputy Chair)	First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division
Mr Graeme Bland	Air Force Association Ltd
Mr Michael Carlon	Australian Special Air Service Association
Mr John McNeill	Australian Veterans Alliance
Ms Pat McCabe OAM	TPI Federation Australia
Ms Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Mr Bill Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Mr John King	Returned & Services League of Australia
Mr Mike Benyk	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (proxy)
Mr Clem Russell OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Association
Ms Evette House	Partners of Veterans Association (proxy)
<b>Presenters</b>	
Alison McLaren	A/g Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience – <i>Item 8</i>
Kerrie-Anne Luscombe	General Counsel – <i>Item 3</i>
David Pullen	First Assistant Secretary, Claims Process Improvement – <i>Item 10</i>
Sarah Kennedy	Assistant Secretary, Client Programs – <i>Items 2 &amp; 12</i>
Sally Dennington	A/g Assistant Secretary, Business Improvement & Quality Assurance – <i>Item 8</i>
Luke Brown	Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform – <i>Items 8 &amp; 14</i>
Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform – <i>Items 8 &amp; 14</i>
Michael Harper	Assistant Secretary, VEA Compensation & Support – <i>Item 3</i>
Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	Assistant Secretary, Hubs – <i>Item 4</i>
Laura Sham	Assistant Secretary, Chief Information Officer Branch – <i>Item 9</i>
Brian Eastman	A/g Assistant Secretary, Benefits Policy Branch – <i>Item 11</i>
Jude V	Director, Liability & Service Eligibility Section – <i>Item 5.1</i>
Wendy C	Director, Benefits & Payments – <i>Item 11</i>
<b>Observers</b>	
Liane Pettitt	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Engagement, Communications & Ministerial
Nick R	Graduate, International & Stakeholder Relations
<b>Secretariat</b>	
Ms Belinda B	Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Morgan S	A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Karen G	Senior Secretariat Officer International & Stakeholder Relations
Mr Jack M	Secretariat Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations
<b>Apologies</b>	
Ms Rona Lunney	Partners of Veterans Association
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia

Mr Rod Hutchings	Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association
Mr Ray Kemp OAM JP	Naval Association of Australia
Mr Robert Connor	Legacy Australia Inc

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