



Minutes

Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming attendees, noting membership changes and representation arrangements for the meeting, as well as apologies received. Details are listed at **Annexure A**. No conflicts of interest were declared. The Ode was recited and Members acknowledged the service and sacrifice of all veterans and families.

Agenda Item 2 Action Items

Members **NOTED** that the 7 December 2023 ESORT Minutes were endorsed out of session on 12 January 2024 and published on the DVA website on 19 January 2024.

Members **AGREED** to close Action Items 2022ESORT/A26, 2023ESORT/A26, A30, A34, A35, A37, A40, A41, A42, A43, A44, A45, A46, A48, A49 and A50.

Members **NOTED** E2020/27, 2022ESORT/A36, 2023ESORT/A27, A28, A29, A32, A33, A39 and A47 remain in progress.

Members **AGREED** the Action Item Register will be revised and formatted to A4 for ease of viewing.

Agenda Item 3 Claims Processing Update

Members received an update on the current status of claims and **NOTED** the recent announcement that no unallocated backlog in Permanent Impairment (PI), Initial Liability (IL) or Incapacity Payments more than two weeks old remain. Members **NOTED** the focus is now on timely on decision making for determination of claims. Members were **ENCOURAGED** to contact the Department if they have any concerns regarding processing times or delays. Members **DISCUSSED** case management and the challenges when more than two case managers are used, and **NOTED** that the 500 additional staff are enduring positions.

Agenda Item 4 Computer Based Decision Making

Members **DISCUSSED** computer based decision making for straightforward claims that are decision ready. Members **NOTED** the straight through processing and streamlining of processes, enabling decision ready claims to be more promptly accepted. DVA **ENCOURAGED** feedback on any conditions and ways to improve the process. Members **NOTED** that computer based decision making is not artificial intelligence (AI) and the Chair **NOTED** the potential consideration of AI to assist with document sorting but that nothing is currently used in this area.

Agenda Item 5.1 Royal Commission Update

Agenda Item 5.2 Legislative Reform Update

Members were updated on the Minister's announcement of the release of the legislative reform Exposure Draft Bill. Members **NOTED** the implementation date of 1 July 2026, from which all future claims will be considered under MRCA, and existing claims under the VEA will be grandparented. Members **NOTED** the key changes and **DISCUSSED** the consultation phase, with feedback required by 28 April 2024. Members were **ENCOURAGED** to discuss the Exposure Draft with their organisation's members and **NOTED** that hard copies of the document could be provided on request.

Agenda Item 6 Modernisation Program and MyService Enhancements Update

Members were updated on Modernisation and enhancements to MyService and **NOTED** the presentation would be circulated out of session. DVA **ACKNOWLEDGED** the hesitancy of some veterans to use the system and members **NOTED** that no claim would be rejected with follow up actions for missing information. Members were advised that formal user acceptance testing as part of the software development lifecycle is carried out by DVA staff as it requires access to DVA's internal network however; DVA has and will continue to co-design system enhancements with the veteran community, including both at a strategic (what functionality do we want?) and implementation (how should this screen look, or how should this functionality work) level. Members **DISCUSSED** placing an upfront notice on MyService, alerting veterans to the free claims assistance provided by advocates, and were advised a costing is underway with the work

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expected to be implemented by 30 June 2024. Members **NOTED** a discovery piece of work on the ESO portal is underway and the summary report will be provided to ESORT. Members **NOTED** TPI Federations request for Wellbeing Advocates to utilise the ESO portal.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A01	Modernisation and MyService Enhancements PowerPoint presentation to be circulated to members following meeting.	Secretariat
2024ESORT/A02	Report back on status of upfront notice on the MyService website, directing veterans to free claims assistance provided by advocates.	Chief Information Officer

Agenda Item 7.1 Hearing Services

Members were updated on Hearing Services and **NOTED** the improvements for veterans with special circumstances where hearing aid requirement exceeds that which is provided by Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC). Members **NOTED** the new forms and plans to streamline hearing services are based on a wellbeing approach. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the veteran focus of the Hearing Services Program (HSP) survey

Agenda Item 7.2 Aged Care Update

Members were updated on the creation of DVA's Aged Care Taskforce which will focus on Residential Aged Care and In Home Care and Community Nursing. Members **DISCUSSED** the need for an aligned process to ensure an easier transition to aged care for veterans. Members **NOTED** that DVA will be working with stakeholders in the sector, as well as closely working with DoHAC and the Aged Care Regulator. Members **NOTED** that DVA is working with the Aged Care Quality and Standards Commission on the inclusion of a veteran indicator for DVA clients entering an aged care facility.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A03	Email address to be provided to ESORT members to notify DVA of any issues with aged care providers not recognising DVA clients.	Aged Care Taskforce
2024ESORT/A04	Standard wording on gold card entitlements in aged care to be provided for ESORT members to share with their members.	Aged Care Taskforce

Agenda Item 8 Member Submission – DVA Vision and Policy for Aged Care

Members **NOTED** the submission, with work continuing on this issue under the Aged Care Taskforce. Members **DISCUSSED** reports of aged care homes closing due to the requirement of a registered nurse and the need for DVA to discuss this with DoHAC and the Aged Care Regulator. Members **NOTED** issues present in General Practitioner (GP) practices regarding differences in pharmaceutical benefits between the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) and the need to ensure GPs are informed of updates. In terms of updating GPs on RPBS changes, it was suggested GPs be directed to the Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC) which is a 24/7 service VAPAC is a pharmaceutical phone centre that GPs or other health professionals can contact to get approval for medical scripts under the RPBS. VAPAC allows health professionals to access pharmaceuticals and wound-care products, which in turn helps veterans to access Government-subsidised pharmaceuticals.

Agenda Item 9 Member Submission – Booked Car with Driver

Members **DISCUSSED** the submission and eligibility for the Booked Car with Driver scheme when a veteran needs to be collected from hospital. Members **NOTED** the need for updated training on eligibility for all DVA clients and staff. DVA will be conducting further training of its staff, particularly in relation to client eligibility for those who are under the age of 80, based on feedback provided by members at the meeting.

Agenda Item 10 Member Submission – DVA Card and Fee Schedules

Members were updated on the submission and **NOTED** it will be circulated out of session for information. Members **NOTED** decisions to amend price setting arrangements for DVA-funded health care services are subject to Government decisions in the Budget. In relation to service provider availability and gap payments being requested when Gold Cards are used, more work is needed to understand the broader issues being experienced by some veterans. There was discussion on the benefits of encouraging greater use of prior approval arrangements as the service provider is paid up front and there cannot be a gap payment claimed from the veteran. DVA agreed to provide a form of words that can be shared with ESOs to encourage increased and simpler use of prior approvals where they are needed. There was also discussion on how reimbursement works under DVA’s Medical Expenses Privately Incurred (MEPI) arrangements where treatment and/or medical services are needed that are not listed in relevant health schedules. Further clarification will be provided on MEPI.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A05	Members to be provided with updated website guidance regarding prior approvals and medical expenses privately incurred (MEPI), and also an update on DVA work to streamline these processes.	Policy & Programs

Agenda Item 11 Member Submission – IGDAF 20 Year Review

Members **NOTED** the submission provided by the Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA) and **DISCUSSED** concerns for Afghanistan veterans. Members **NOTED** the desire of the ASASA for members to be aware of the submission and inform their members and DVA staff to be aware of the soldiers’ viewpoint provided.

Agenda Item 12 Secretary’s Update

Members received an update from the Secretary who **NOTED** that key updates were items on the agenda. The Secretary discussed the focus on MATES and **DISCUSSED** how DVA is seeking to work together with ESORT on advice they provide to their organisations in order to ensure an appreciation of the positive health outcomes from the program are recognised. The Secretary highlighted the need to build confidence in the veteran community that DVA exists to assist veterans and asked members for their thoughts on how this might better be realised. Members **NOTED** the need for DVA to be proactive with good news stories and to actively share these with the veteran community.

Agenda Item 13.1 Privacy & Consent Reform

Agenda Item 13.2 Member Submission – MATES Privacy Breach

Members **DISCUSSED** the submission provided on the MATES Privacy Breach and **NOTED** that all White and Gold Card holders would receive correspondence on the consent process for MATES. Members **DISCUSSED** how privacy and ethics have changed over time, and **NOTED** the importance of governance and safeguarding of information. Members **NOTED** that data obtained by the program is DVA data and will not be retained by the University of South Australia. The Chair reiterated that she or the Deputy Secretary are available to address any concerns an organisation’s members may have, and to attend executive meetings to answer questions

Agenda Item 14 OneESO

Members were updated on the proposal for an Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) peak body and informed that a consultant would be engaged by DVA to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. Some Members **NOTED** the recommendation for a peak body, and that they would all be contacted by the consultants seeking their views and that of their organisations. Members **NOTED** their desire to move away from the naming of ‘ESO’ to encompass a broader range of the veteran community. Members **NOTED** that this will be reviewed in line with the National Consultation Framework (NCF) Review.

Agenda Item 15 Grants Reform

Members **NOTED** the update on grants and that DVA continues to consult on and seek to more strategically align grants programs. Members **SUPPORTED** the reconfiguring of the current Grants Working Group to gain representatives from the broader national and state levels and **NOTED** that further information would be circulated.

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Members **NOTED** that consultation with ESORT would continue, ensuring grants arrangements align with broader requirements.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A06	Invitation to be extended to ESORT members for the re-invigoration of the Grants Working Group to include broader representation across national and state levels.	Ministerial, Engagement and Communication

Agenda Item 16 Co-Design/Consultation Calendar

Members were updated on new forums to increase engagement with the veteran community on a range of issues. Six consultative forums will be held this year, with the first forum on Aged Care, to take place on 9 April. ESORT will continue to be updated on these forums.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A07	Members to be updated on the veteran engagement co-design/consultation forums being run in 2024.	Ministerial, Engagement and Communication

Agenda Item 17 Advocacy Update

Members were updated on the work underway on Advocacy, including the call for nominations for the new working group. Members **NOTED** the communications strategy developed to promote the value of free ESO advocacy services, the new entry level Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) courses and the information sharing between DVA and ESO advocates. Members **NOTED** the Claims Assistance Pilot commencing in February 2024, where DVA staff are providing direct assistance to veterans in the preparation and lodgement of their DVA claims. DVA **ACKNOWLEDGED** concerns that it could be seen as supplanting the role of advocates and reassured members this is to ensure DVA are available to assist with lodging the claim electronically, thereby providing greater capacity for advocates to deliver their service.

Agenda Item 18 Anzac Day Engagement Program

Members **NOTED** two Gallipoli Scholarship Fund recipients will join the Gallipoli commemorations team in April. Members **DISCUSSED** the intention to broaden the remit for how services are delivered from 2025, for a larger and more inclusive group. DVA **ENCOURAGED** feedback from members on how it could broaden this opportunity.

Agenda Item 10 Other Business

The Royal Australian Regiment Corporation representative shared the story of a veteran who received cannabis treatment after enduring significant issues for years, with the treatment having a positive impact on their daily life.

The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) representative raised the issue of time differences between Perth and Canberra and the approval of rehabilitation appliances outside of normal East-coast hours. Members **NOTED** the Rehabilitation Application team currently work until 4pm, Western Australia time and will be looking to trial a new arrangement until 5pm, Western Australian time. Members **NOTED** that ESORT will be advised on progress of the trial. Working from home arrangements were also raised and it was **NOTED** the relevant team is predominately in the office.

The Department of Defence representative advised ESORT members that the Safeguarding Australia’s military secrets legislation is expected to be presented to Parliament in the next two weeks, with a communications plan to be shared with ESORT. Members **NOTED** concerns that comments on the draft in 2023 were not widely known. Defence provided the following link <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/governance/defence-amendment-safeguarding-australias-military-secrets-bill-2023> and advised that material will be provided to ESORT in due course.

The Legacy Australia Inc. representative asked for an Information Access Unit email for a request for information. This will be managed offline.

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Members were advised that this was the last ESORT meeting for Deputy President, Ms Kate Pope PSM. The Chair thanked Ms Pope for her contribution to ESORT and the Department.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A08	Department of Defence to provide supporting material to ESORT members regarding the Safeguarding Australia's military secrets legislation.	Department of Defence
2024ESORT/A09	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International & Stakeholder Relations and Legacy Australia Inc. representative to discuss correspondence with the Information Access Unit.	Ministerial, Engagement and Communication

Meeting closed: 4.00pm.

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ESORT Members	
Ms Alison Frame	Chair, President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC)
Ms Kate Pope PSM	Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Mr Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Mr Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	A/g Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooji CSC	MRCC, Department of Defence (proxy)
CDRE Nicole Curtis	MRCC, Department of Defence (proxy)
The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith	Australian Special Air Service Association
CMDR RAN (Retd) Ward Gainey JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia (proxy)
BRIG Michael Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Ms Pat McCabe OAM	TPI Federation Australia
Ms Bev Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Ms Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Mr David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Mr Nathan Poy	Soldier On (proxy)
GCAPT Carl Schiller OAM CSM (Retd)	Air Force Association
Mr Mike von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Mr Ian Lindgren	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Mr (Legatee) Wayne McNee	Legacy Australia Inc
MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD SC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Ms Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
Other Attendees	
Mr Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary Policy & Programs
Ms Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience
Mr James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Presenters	
Mr Alexander Caroly	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Claims Process Improvement – Items 3 & 4
Ms Sally Dennington	Assistant Secretary, Business Improvement & Quality Assurance – Item 4
Mr Luke Brown	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Royal Commission Implementation – Items 5.1 & 5.2
Mr Alex Lewis	Chief Information Officer, Finance, Technology & Insights – Item 6
Mr David Pullen	First Assistant Secretary, Program Deliver – Items 7.1, 9
Ms Leanne Cameron	First Assistant Secretary, Aged and Community Care Taskforce – Items 7.2, 8
Observers	
Mr Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Legislative Reform – Items 5.1 & 5.2
Ms Sarah Kennedy	Assistant Secretary, Aged and Community Care Taskforce – Items 7.2 & 8
Ms Heather MacDonald	Assistant Secretary, Engagement and co-Design – Item 16

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Ms Nadine Clode	Assistant Secretary, Community Policy and Research – <i>Item 17</i>
Ms Liane Pettitt	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, Engagement & Communication
Mr Chris Lowis	Defence Force Welfare Association
Mr Chris Moss	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Mr David Ballantyne	Homefront Australia
Apologies	
Ms Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Ms Amy Cooper	Soldier On
Mr William (Bill) Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Defence Families Australia	No replacement
RADM Sonya Bennett	MRCC, Department of Defence
MAJGEN Wade Stothart DSC AM CSC	MRCC, Department of Defence
Secretariat	
Mr Mark Kalleske	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Morgan S	A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations