



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 welcomed observers. Members **NOTED** apologies as listed at Annexure A and no conflicts of interest were raised.

The Ode was recited, and members acknowledged the service and sacrifice of all veterans and families.

The Chair welcomed RADM Letitia van Stralen AM, CSC, RAN (Defence People Group), noting that this is the first meeting RADM van Stralen has attended since being appointed to the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission. as the new Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) representing the Defence People Group.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Update – Secretary Alison Frame

Members **NOTED** updates provided by the Chair, including key developments and achievements across the veteran support system:

- Appointment of Annabelle Wilson as the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner.
- Anniversary of the Royal Commission Final Report, including key achievements such as the establishment of the Defence and Veterans' Services Commissioner, and the launch of a new DVA website and Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered search tool.
- Partnership between DVA and Phoenix Australia to deliver the Veteran and Family Learning Innovation Network of Knowledge (VF-LINK).
- Progress of the Taskforce on the new Agency focussed on Wellbeing and Peak Body, with consultation and co-design activities underway to develop organisational models.
- DVA updates to Provider Notes addressing concerns about health practitioners making unnecessary referrals or recommendations.
 - Members **NOTED** that:
 - Providers must disclose any commercial or other interest when recommending or referring veterans to another provider, service or product.
 - Providers found to be in serious non-compliance may be ineligible to provide services to DVA clients and may be named publicly.
 - These changes are designed to safeguard the integrity of the veteran support system and promote safe, ethical and reliable care.
 - Veterans are encouraged to report concerns about provider conduct via the dedicated DVA fraud tip-off email.
- Commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the 75th Anniversary of Australian service in the Malayan Emergency.

Agenda Item 2 Action items

Members **NOTED** the minutes from the meeting on 17 June 2025 were endorsed out-of-session and published on the DVA Website on 15 August 2025.

Members **AGREED** to close action items 2025ESORT/A05, A06, A07, A10, A11, A14.

Members **NOTED** action items 2020ESORT/A27, 2024ESORT/A37, 2025ESORT/A08, A09, A12, A13 remain in progress.

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Agenda Item 3 Member Submission - Provision of critical silver wound dressing support for veterans with accepted conditions (The Royal Australian Regiment Corporation)

Members **NOTED**

- the submission submitted by the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation regarding the provision of critical silver wound dressing support for veterans with accepted conditions.
- the process for eligible Veteran Card holders to receive subsidised wound care items under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS).
- the need for critical silver wound dressings to be covered by DVA for veterans with accepted conditions, rather than paid for by the veteran.
- that some medical providers are charging veterans between \$30 to \$50 for silver wound dressings, despite these dressing being eligible for DVA coverage.

Members **DISCUSSED** and noted that this issue particularly affects veterans travelling in regional and remote areas who rely on multiple providers to have their wounds dressed.

Members **AGREED** that general practitioners and providers should be made aware that supply of these dressings can be billed directly to DVA.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A15	To clarify that critical silver wound dressings for accepted conditions can be billed directly to DVA and to raise awareness among medical providers.	Chief Health Officer

Agenda Item 4 Member Submission - Home Care – DVA Support (Defence Force Welfare Association)

Members **NOTED**

- the submission submitted by the Defence Force Welfare Association regarding provision of services under DVA's Home Care program.
- concerns about the current provisions for cleaning windows and gutters under the Home Help Services (HHS) program, particularly for double-storey houses. Current funding does not cover these services leaving a significant gap for many veterans who cannot afford the costs privately.
- budget restrictions, program authorities and occupational health and safety regulations limit what can be provided and **ACKNOWLEDGED** that a budget submission would be needed to address service gaps where new services are required.
- DVA is working with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to align contract rates and bridge funding gaps, while also acknowledging the workforce shortages that continue to affect service delivery.

Members **DISCUSSED**

- the need to reassess how DVA defines tender specifications to include both single and double-storey homes in its contracted services.
- changes to construction standards which may raise ceiling heights and the potential increase in costs for window and gutter cleaning, which may place additional financial strain on veterans.

Members **RAISED** concerns about turnover of providers, noting cases where older veterans lose trusted providers when contracts are not renewed, creating disruption and uncertainty for those reliant on consistent care.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A16	The Department to review current window and gutter specifications under the Home Help Services program to determine what is covered by providers, and to assess what changes may be required to include double-storey houses within occupational health and safety requirements.	Program Delivery

UPDATES ON DVA INITIATIVES

Agenda Item 5.1 Overview of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pilots and AI Use

Members **NOTED**

- DVA is already using AI, (excluding personal information), with several Copilot licenses and plans to expand usage in coming months.
- DVA has established an AI governance board, to ensure compliance with privacy, legislative, and ethical requirements.
- AI will not be used to determine eligibility for War Widow(ers)'s Pension or Wholly Dependent Partner Payment. These decisions will continue to be made by humans based on documentation, as indeed will all DVA payment and compensation decisions.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED**

- AI is currently being used with dummy data to test how it can support claims processing, assisting staff with information gathering and claim synthesis.
- other government departments are advancing the use of AI, and DVA will work to keep pace.

Members **DISCUSSED**

- the importance of ensuring privacy acknowledgments and clear agreements before establishing the use of AI with access to veteran personal information. Members were reassured that use of AI will be to support DVA delegates to reduce manual workload, make faster, better-informed decisions and will not replace human decision-making. Members stressed the need for messaging that reassures veterans that human involvement is retained.
- the AI-powered search engine on the DVA website, sharing mixed experiences and **NOTED** improvements based on feedback on search accuracy and content presentation are underway.

Members **SHARED** that some veteran organisations are also trialling AI internally for data analysis and volunteer management and offered to collaborate with DVA to share insights.

Agenda Item 5.2 Integrity and Compliance Activities

Members **NOTED**

- DVA is taking steps to ensure veterans, and their families can access safe and reliable support. DVA is working with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and other partners to take action against companies and providers engaging in unethical behaviour.
- examples of concerning behaviour from some providers and advocates and **NOTED** that in response, DVA is introducing a medical compensation fee schedule and guidance to clarify reasonable costs. A dedicated Invoice Compliance Team has been set up to monitor and ensure compliance.
- the establishment of the Institute of Veterans' Advocates (IVA) and its Code of Conduct for advocates, welcoming DVA's commitment to collaboration with ESORT.

Members **NOTED** the integrity and compliance activity progress achieved so far, including:

- 288 compliance audits underway.
- 59 intelligence assessments completed.

- Changes to high-risk provider access, switching some to manual payments.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of education to help providers and advocates comply with regulations. DVA has produced guides, fact sheets, and training to support compliance.

Members **NOTED** the establishment of the Institute of Veterans' Advocates (IVA) and its Code of Conduct for advocates, welcoming DVA's commitment to collaboration with ESORT.

Members **DISCUSSED** the effectiveness of these measures in disrupting fraudulent practices and reducing non-genuine activity in the veteran community, acknowledging the importance of targeting bad actors while avoiding unnecessary red tape for those doing the right thing.

Members raised concerns about potential unintended consequences, such as creating additional barriers for veterans and legitimate service providers.

Members **NOTED** that fraudulent activity can lead to additional costs being passed on to veterans, and that some may seek alternative advocates outside the system, including fee-for-service options.

Members **DISCUSSED** the growing gap in payment schedules and the need for regular review to keep pace with changing costs.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A17	To support DVA in identifying service gaps and addressing payment schedule issues, ESORT members to continue providing DVA with data and examples of where veterans are unable to use their DVA treatment cards to access medical providers and services.	ESORT members

Agenda Item 5.3 Progress update on new Agency focused on Wellbeing and Peak Body

Members **NOTED** the progress of the work of the Taskforce on Wellbeing Agency and Peak Body.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the extensive consultation and co-design process undertaken for the establishment of the Wellbeing Agency and Peak Body and the importance of collaboration with Defence throughout this work, recognising the need for closer collaboration with Defence on separation and transfer processes.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of maintaining accountability structures post-service and reducing inefficiencies and overlap between Defence and DVA responsibilities during transition.

Members **NOTED** that the Agency must be nationally distributed, with strong connections to local communities where veterans and their families live, rather than being solely Canberra-based.

Members **RECOGNISED** that the Agency's role should focus on early identification of emerging issues, prevention, early intervention, and supporting wellbeing through life-stage transition planning, navigation referrals, and community connection.

Members **AGREED** that establishing the agency will be a multi-year process requiring flexibility, and adaptive approaches, with feedback from veterans and families being critical to success.

Members **DISCUSSED** the agency's potential to deliver several Royal Commission recommendations, including those on transition, program sustainability, and medical assessment pilots.

Members **NOTED** the need for clear planning and sustainable budgeting to ensure the agency delivers effective support.

Peak Body

Members **AGREED** the ex-service community will play a key role in determining how the Peak Body will function and how it will work with the agency to connect veteran to services, **NOTING** that while government may support and enable the peak body, it must be designed by and for the ex-service community to ensure trust and legitimacy.

Members **REFLECTED** on past efforts, including working groups and submissions, and emphasised the need to use that work as a basis for moving forward rather than starting again.

Members **AGREED** that success will require strong participation, consensus-building, and potentially an accreditation framework to improve ESO coordination and representation.

Agenda Item 5.4 Advocacy and Recruitment of New Advocates for Training

Members **NOTED**

- the initiatives that DVA and the IVA have agreed through the ESORT Advocacy Working Group to re-invigorate awareness of and interest in volunteer advocacy.
- the ongoing work being done through the Operational Working Party and ESORT Advocacy Working Group to build and strengthen the veteran advocacy workforce. This includes reviewing and promoting training modules and encouraging the Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) to actively participate in and sponsor advocates for training.
- there are currently 843 advocates on the Advocacy Register, with 392 of those qualifications issued in the 2024-25 program year and **DISCUSSED** the need to improve retention given the high rate of drop-off after training.
- efforts are being made to reduce the time required to become an advocate, which may encourage more applicants.
- the establishment of the IVA to accredit veteran advocates, lift national standards, and strengthen governance. The re-invigoration of the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) volunteer Regional Manager Model was also noted as way to improve local engagement and communications. Members **HIGHLIGHTED** the importance of advocates maintaining independence from DVA and the need for transparent accreditation processes, including criminal record checks.
- the commencement of DVA's 'Making a Claim' campaign, aimed to provide veterans and families with clear and consistent information about their options when lodging a claim. Members **DISCUSSED** the campaign's progress, noting it is currently in Phase 1 of its rollout and has received both positive and critical feedback.

Members **DISCUSSED**

- the importance of in-person training, peer support, and re-engaging advocates who may have ceased volunteering during COVID.
- suggestions to promote the campaign through TV advertising for broader public awareness and **NOTED** that further updates will be provided on this option.

Members **RAISED** concerns about the low participation rate of female advocates and **AGREED** that targeted efforts should be made encourage women, Indigenous Australians, and those transitioning from the ADF to take up advocacy roles.

Members **AGREED** communication materials, including campaign updates and presentations, should be shared with members for further awareness.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A18	Secretariat to circulate the 'Making a Claim' campaign PowerPoint Presentation.	Secretariat

Agenda Item 5.5 Update on DVA Actions for mTBI and Blast Overpressure Exposure

Members **NOTED**

- Defence and DVA will continue to collaborate on the design of a brain injury program to support serving and ex-serving personnel.
- DVA has engaged with the University of New South Wales to conduct a literature review to remain informed of emerging research into mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI) and repetitive low-level blast over pressure (rLLB) exposure.
- research identified in the literature review will be provided to Defence and the Repatriation Medical Authority.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS WERE PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION AND WERE DISCUSSED BY EXCEPTION

Agenda Item 6.1 Legislative Reform Update

Members **NOTED** the update on Legislative Reform as set out in the papers circulated to members.

Agenda Item 6.2 Claims Processing Update

Members **NOTED** the update on Claims Processing as set out in the papers circulated to members.

Agenda Item 6.3 Veteran Employment Program – 2025 Prime Minister’s National Veteran Employment Awards update

Members **NOTED** the update on the Veteran Employment Program as set out in the papers circulated to members.

Agenda Item 6.4 Update on DVA Grants

Members **NOTED**

- the information provided regarding the annual and terminating grants administered by the Grants and Hubs Branch as set out in the papers circulated to members.
- the update on DVA grants, including the Grants in Aid (GIA) grants, and **DISCUSSED** the outcomes of the 2025-26 grant rounds.
- that letters confirming the grant outcomes have been issued and **AGREED** that further clarification was needed regarding the future direction of GIA funding and the basis for determining grant amounts.

Members **DISCUSSED** the recent announcement of the GIA grants results and clarified that a one-off increase to \$25,000 was provided pre-election. Members **RAISED** concerns that the amount will revert to \$10,000 in future rounds, which does not reflect the rising travel and operational costs faced by ESOs.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A19	DVA to provide advice on the proposed next steps for the GIA program in 2026.	Veterans Experience and Transition

Agenda Item 6.5 Update on the redevelopment of the Western Australian and Hobart Gardens of Remembrance

Members **NOTED** the update on the redevelopment of the Western Australian and Hobart Gardens of Remembrance as set out in the papers circulated to members.

Agenda Item 7 Other Business

Members **DISCUSSED** ongoing concerns regarding DVA Fee Schedules for medical assessments and GP payments, noting it continues to cause frustrations for veterans and the need to investigate GP and medical professional concerns about their ability to meet veterans' needs.

Members **NOTED**

- concerns about recent changes to the process for submitting claims for reimbursement of travel expenses to attend medical treatment, including new requirements for receipt submission. Members **AGREED** that clarity was needed and requested further advice of the change be provided to the veteran community.
- a member submission from Legacy Australia calling for an increase to War Widow(ers)'s Pension and Wholly Dependent Partner Payment and **REQUESTED** that an out-of-session response be provided to members. Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of strengthening the submission by seeking additional support from other ESO groups.
- that the Australian War Memorial has added the names of 24 soldiers killed in counterterrorism and special recovery operational service to the Honour Roll. Members **DISCUSSED** that this development may have implication for qualifying service and veteran entitlements, including gold card eligibility, and **AGREED** this should be reviewed by Defence.

Members **DISCUSSED** the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) Weaponisation Review and the potential financial, legal and reputational impacts for DVA and government if similar issues arise in future conflicts.

Members **COMMENDED** the quality of the 75th Malayan Emergency Service Memorial and acknowledged DVA's role in maintaining the service.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** concerns raised about the cost of traffic control for the HMAS Canberra Memorial Service, which may impact the ability of associations to continue running the event. Members **DISCUSSED** whether support could be sought from the National Capital Authority or DVA.

The Chair **ACKNOWLEDGED** outgoing ESORT members, MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD FANZCN SC from the Returned and Services League of Australia and Wayne McNee from Legacy Australia and thanked them for their contribution and leadership.

Members **AGREED** to extend ESORT membership to include representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association and Women Veterans Australia Ltd.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A20	To review the current DVA Fee Schedule for medical assessments and GP payments, including how it compares with NDIA/NDIS arrangements, bring back recommendations and options for ESORT to consider. Findings will be brought back to ESORT for discussion.	Policy and Research
2025ESORT/A21	To confirm when and how the new travel claim requirements were communicated and consider improving communication processes for future changes to minimise confusion.	Client Benefits
2025ESORT/A22	Repatriation Commissioner and Deputy Secretary for Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience to determine if DVA can provide traffic management costs for the HMAS Canberra Memorial Service.	Repatriation Commissioner and Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience
2025ESORT/A23	Secretariat to invite representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association and Women Veterans Australia Ltd at the next ESORT meeting and update the Terms of Reference accordingly and with other amendments as required.	Secretariat

Agenda Item 8 ESORT Communique

Members were provided the ESORT Communique following the meeting for endorsement ahead of its publication on the DVA Website.

Meeting closed: 2.30pm

Annexure A

ESORT Members	
Alison Frame	Chair, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs and MRCC Member
Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Kahlil Fegan DSC, AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Annabelle Wilson	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Peter Colliver OAM	Air Force Association (<i>proxy</i>)
Mark Horner	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association (<i>proxy</i>)
The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith	Australian Special Air Service Association
Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Charlotte Webb	Defence Families Australia
Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
MAJGEN Ian Flawith AO, CSC (Rtd)	Defence Reserves Association (<i>proxy</i>)
RADM Sonya Bennett AM	Department of Defence
Wayne McNee	Legacy Australia Inc
RADM Letitia van Stralen AM, CSC, RAN	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD FANZCN SC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Mike von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Paul Singer CVO	Soldier On
Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Scott Jeffrey	TPI Federation Australia
Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
William Roberts OAM	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Other Attendees	
Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs
Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience
Brenton Philp	Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer
James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooij CSC	Department of Defence
Presenters	
Tara Cavanagh	First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits
Ingrid Nagy	Assistant Secretary, Communications
Sally Bradford	Executive Director, Service Design Finance and Program Integrity Taskforce
Observers	
Legatee Mark Lax	Legacy Australia Inc
Keely Dreghorn	Returned and Services League of Australia

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Debbie Arnold	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial Engagement and Communications
Amanda Conroy	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations
Brad Clarke	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Jessica Law	Senior Secretariat Support Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Joe Iervasi AM, CSC	Air Force Association
Rod Henderson	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
BRIG Mike Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association

Next Meeting – TBC

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