

National ESO peak body – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Last updated 16 April 2026.

This FAQ has been prepared in response to the peak body Information Session (Town Hall) hosted by Alison McLaren DVA Deputy Secretary – Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Engagement Group and Nick Booth, Special Advisor on 8 April 2026. It also includes questions and comments captured through other meetings and engagements including the Deputy Commissioner Consultative Forums, ESO Roundtable and Younger Veterans Forum.

It is intended to be updated periodically to ensure the information remains a current reference point for members of the veteran and family support sector.

BACKGROUND:

1. What is the National ESO peak body?

The National ESO peak body is a proposed independent organisation, established to represent the ex-service organisation (ESO) sector collectively. Its core purpose is to strengthen coordination, collaboration, and representation across the sector so that veterans and their families experience a more coherent, effective and trusted support system. The proposal responds directly to Recommendation 89 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and builds on several years of sector-led and government-supported consultation dating back to 2022.

2. Why is a peak body being established?

The Royal Commission found that veteran support in Australia is highly fragmented, with no single authoritative national voice for ESOs. This fragmentation has led to duplication in some areas, gaps in others, and inconsistent engagement with government (at all levels), industry and the veteran and family community.

3. What has happened so far?

Work on the peak body has progressed in stages over several years. Early ESO-led forums between 2022 and 2023 helped shape initial thinking. In 2024 and 2025, further consultation and co-design work was undertaken with support from the Department of Veterans' Affairs and external advisors, alongside analysis of Royal Commission evidence and submissions. Work continues with the appointment of Nick Booth MVO, special advisor who will lead a six-month project to consolidate views from across the sector, examine Australian and international models, and by mid-August 2026 progress options and recommendations for the implementation of the peak body.

4. What is the role of the Special Advisor and the peak body Project?

Nick Booth MVO has been appointed as an independent Special Advisor to the Australian Government to support the next phase of establishing a National ESO peak body. He brings more than three decades of senior leadership and advisory experience across the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States in veteran welfare, mental health, community development and large-scale sector reform. Nick is currently the Chief Executive Officer of True Patriot Love, Canada's national organisation supporting military members, veterans and their families.

In his role as Special Advisor, Nick is working across government, the ESO sector and the broader veteran and family community on a time-limited engagement (to August 2026) to progress implementation of Recommendation 89 of the Royal Commission. His focus is on listening to stakeholders, consolidating what has already been heard through previous consultation, examining international and domestic models, and helping to develop practical, evidence-informed options for the peak body's role, functions, governance, funding and sustainability. Nick is supported by a small team at the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES (at April 2026):

5. What would the peak body do?

While final decisions have not yet been made, consultation indicates strong and consistent support for a set of core functions. These include providing a collective and informed voice to governments across jurisdictions; promoting sound governance and safe, high-quality practice across the sector, and strengthening collaboration so that duplication is reduced and cooperation is improved. The peak body is also expected to play a role in connecting research, evaluation and lived experience to policy and practice, and in supporting a clear, credible public narrative for the ESO sector. These functions remain indicative and will continue to be refined through consultation.

6. What will the peak body not do?

Stakeholders were clear that the peak body should not replace or duplicate existing roles within the veteran ecosystem. It is not intended to deliver direct services to individual veterans or families, act as a regulator or statutory enforcement body, or undertake individual claims advocacy. Importantly, it would not restrict the ability of organisations or individuals to engage directly with Ministers, Members of Parliament or government departments. The intent is to complement existing mechanisms rather than centralise or control them.

7. Who would the peak body represent?

The peak body is intended to reflect the full diversity of the veteran and family support sector. This includes large and small organisations, national, state, regional and community-based ESOs, and organisations with different service, geographic and functional focuses. Design work acknowledges long-standing concerns about balancing the influence of well-resourced national organisations with the voices of smaller or regional groups, and seeks to address these concerns explicitly.

8. How will smaller and regional ESOs be included?

Consultation highlighted the importance of inclusion arrangements that do not disadvantage smaller or less-resourced organisations. Options under consideration include inclusive membership or engagement models, multiple pathways for participation, and mechanisms such as surveys, forums, communities of practice and thematic working groups. The aim is to enable meaningful participation rather than symbolic or token representation.

9. How will independence from government be ensured?

Independence and trust emerged as central themes throughout engagement. While working with government will remain important, a range of options are being examined to protect the credibility and independence of the peak body. These include clear governance and accountability arrangements, an independent and skills-based board, funding agreements that safeguard advocacy independence, and strong transparency in decision-making and priorities. Stakeholders also highlighted the risks to legitimacy if independence is not clearly demonstrated.

10. What does “raising standards” mean?

Raising standards is not intended to imply regulation or enforcement. Instead, it refers to sector-led approaches such as agreed principles or charters for participation, codes of conduct, expectations around governance and accountability, and the promotion of clinically safe and evidence-informed practice. Consultation also highlighted the risks associated with mandatory accreditation models, particularly for smaller organisations, and these risks are being carefully considered as options are developed.

11. How does the peak body relate to advocacy bodies such as the Institute of Veterans’ Advocates (IVA)?

The proposed peak body is not intended to play a role in claims advocacy or the training of individual advocates. Bodies such as the Institute of Veterans’ Advocates have a specific and important role within the veteran support ecosystem. The peak body’s role would be broader and more systemic, with collaboration expected where there are shared interests, while maintaining clear boundaries between functions.

12. Will I need to go through the peak body to interact with government?

The peak body is expected to become a key engagement mechanism for government, providing consolidated advice informed by the experience and perspectives of the ESO sector. It would not replace existing engagement channels or limit direct interaction between ESOs, individuals and government. Instead, it would offer an additional coordinated pathway that supports more consistent and informed policy interaction.

13. How can ESOs and stakeholders provide input?

Opportunities to provide input will continue throughout the design process. These include future Town Halls and information sessions, targeted consultations and forums.

This document can be updated as further consultation occurs and as decisions are made on the final design and establishment of the National ESO peak body.