



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table December 2025

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Tuesday 9 December 2025.

DVA update – Acting Secretary Andrew Kefford

The Acting DVA Secretary provided an update, including the significant progress that has been made on implementing the Government's response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and recent announcements made by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel. He advised members that applications for the 2025–26 Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program are now open, as well as registrations for Anzac Day 2026 overseas services. He also informed members of DVA arrangements over the Christmas period, including the availability of Open Arms' counselling service 365 days a year.

Update on ESO Peak Body

Nick Booth, CEO of True Patriot Love Foundation, Canada, advised ESORT members that from February 2026, he will be working with the ex-service organisation (ESO) community to further progress the proposal to establish a national peak body for ESOs. (Recommendation 89 of the Royal Commission). Members of ESORT also discussed the background to Recommendation 89, and the letter from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Members also noted the formation of a steering committee of like-minded individuals from the ex-service organisation sector which is working on developing frameworks for a peak body and sought to know more about the terms of reference of the committee.

ESORT Member Submissions

Update on DVA Evaluation of Wellbeing Hubs

DVA advised it has engaged La Trobe University to design and undertake an evaluation of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs program.

The evaluation aims to gather a community-centred view of the experience of people who are using hubs, including their expectations, needs, satisfaction levels, concerns and the supports they receive. The evaluation will also seek to understand the views of other stakeholders, including those who are not accessing the hubs and their barriers to access.

Phase 1 has been completed and Phase 2 is underway. The evaluation is expected to be finalised by mid-2026 and the outcomes will be reported back to ESORT. The update was noted by ESORT members.

Extension of GST concessions to Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) and Additional Disablement Amount (ADA) recipients

DVA provided information about the Goods and Services Tax (GST) exemption and other benefits available to certain eligible veterans in response to the RSL Australia submission to extend current eligibility criteria for GST exemptions to Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) and Additional Disablement Amount (ADA) recipients. The information was noted by ESORT members.

Update on Medicinal Cannabis Prescribing Behaviours

DVA remains very concerned about the way medicinal cannabis is being prescribed. Where appropriate, DVA funds medicinal cannabis for a number of health conditions, including chronic pain. DVA does not fund medicinal cannabis for the treatment of mental health conditions. The Department has been working closely with the Commissions, the Department of Health, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. DVA hopes to be able to share more information with ESORT in due course. The update was noted by ESORT members.

DVA Critical Initiatives

Update and introduction from New Director of War Graves, including update on GRM Major Works Project Perth and Hobart

The newly appointed Director of War Graves, Wade Stothart, introduced himself to ESORT members and provided an update on current activities in the

Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG). He provided a summary of current and emerging tenure issues and an update on the Western Australian and Hobart Gardens of Remembrance.

Update and discussion on Commemorations program and Associated Activities

DVA provided ESORT members with an update on its commemorations program. In 2025, DVA delivered National Commemorative Services for:

- 75th Anniversary of Australian service in the Korean War
- 75th Anniversary of Australian service in the Malayan Emergency.

The broadcast of these services remain available on the DVA website.

DVA also supported 12 Second World War veterans to attend the Last Post ceremony for the 80th Anniversary of Victory in the Pacific Day at the Australian War Memorial.

In 2026, DVA will deliver National Commemorative Services for:

- 75th Anniversary of National Service in February
- 25th Anniversary of service in Afghanistan in October.

ESORT members were also advised that DVA has published its 2024–25 regulatory report about the ‘Use of the Word Anzac’, which is available on the [DVA website](#).

MDMA/Psilocybin

DVA advised ESORT members that from 3 November 2025, it has commenced assessing treatment funding requests for psychedelic assisted psychotherapy (PAP). The Department has strict eligibility and funding guidelines to ensure veterans access PAP safely. This treatment option is part of DVA’s commitment to providing veterans with access to high-quality, safe, and effective mental health care. More detailed information can be found on the DVA web page on [Psychedelic Assisted Psychotherapy using MDMA or Psilocybin](#).

Suicide Prevention Framework

DVA informed ESORT members that it has developed a Suicide Prevention Framework to address veteran suicide and suicidal distress within the Australian community. The Framework is accompanied by an Implementation Plan. The Framework was released by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel on 5 November 2025.

DVA is the first Commonwealth agency to introduce a Department-specific suicide prevention framework aligned with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, providing a strong example of cross portfolio collaboration.

The Suicide Prevention Framework is not a set of instructions; it is a collaborative approach that identifies where DVA, government, providers, communities and individuals can upskill, coordinate and collaborate. This includes ESOs in communities across Australia.

Integrity of the Veteran Support System

Over the past 18–24 months there has been a significant increase in inappropriate and non-compliant behaviours by certain advocates (especially those that charge commissions-based fees) and medical providers engaging with veterans and DVA in the Department's claims and service delivery programs.

DVA informed ESORT members that it is establishing a new Provider Integrity Division to strengthen its capability in this space. The Division will lead the Department's expanding program integrity and compliance work through the prevention, detection and response to alleged fraud or other irregular practices in DVA's claims process and service delivery arrangements.

This will safeguard Australia's military compensation system and allow the Department to properly address inappropriate or illegal activity when it is identified.

Minister's Update

Minister Keogh summarised the work that has been achieved over the year in relation to implementing the Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. He highlighted the passage of the VETS Act, establishing the legislative basis for the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission, the standing up of the Commission in September and the allocation of \$78 million for the new Wellbeing Agency. The Minister said that a quarter of the recommendations will have been implemented by the end of the year. He thanked ESORT members for their active participation over 2025 and their support and advice. He said he looked forward to working with ESORT members on continuing to progress the recommendations in 2026, including the development of the ESO peak body.

Volunteer Work

DVA provided ESORT members with information on what the Department considers volunteer work and how participating in volunteer work might

impact a veteran's entitlement to compensation and/or income support payments where work capacity forms part of the eligibility considerations.

Claims Processing Update

ESORT members were advised that the most recent claims reporting data can be found on the DVA Claims Processing Webpage:

<https://www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing>. The page reports on all key metrics relating to the claims process.

mlcoa - Complaints Data & Process

DVA provided an update on statistics on complaints regarding the quality of mlcoa assessments and reports, and the process for addressing complaints. ESORT members noted the update including that less than fifty complaints have been received since the contract commenced during which time 15,735 reports have been completed.

Institute of Veterans' Advocacy

ESORT members noted the Australian Government will provide new investment to strengthen governance in the veterans' advocacy sector, including funding to support the operations of the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy; new legislation to regulate inappropriate billing practices; and more than double the funding available to ESOs through the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) grants program, which will also be restructured to better support free advocacy services. Members also noted the tabling of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Report into issues relating to advocacy services for veterans accessing compensation and income support, and the status of the Government's response.

Other Business

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

- Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum Update
- Christmas reduced activity period
- Alignment of indexation dates between CSC and DVA
- Veterans' Home Care under the new legislation
- Terminology and the definition of the word 'veteran' and preference for the use of the term 'Families of veterans'.

ESORT Members in attendance
A/g Chair, A/g Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs
Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association (Proxy)
Air Force Association
Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Australian Special Air Service Association
Australian War Widows Inc (Proxy)
Defence Families Australia
Defence Force Welfare Association
Defence People Group
Defence Reserves Association
Legacy Australia Inc
MRCC Member, Department of Defence (Proxy)
Returned and Services League of Australia
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Soldier On
The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
TPI Federation Australia (Virtual)
Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Women Veterans Australia Ltd

Apologies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
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Australian War Widows Inc

Naval Association of Australia

MRCC Member, Department of Defence

Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs
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