



MINUTES

Agenda Item 1. Opening Remarks

Acting Chair, Mr Charles McHardie welcomed members to the meeting of the Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) and explained that he would be chairing this morning and Mr Craig Orme will then takeover after morning tea. Members noted the following apologies:

- Mr Don Spinks AM(Chair),
- LT Natalie Huntsman,
- Ms Talissa Papamau,
- Mr Jason Donoghue, and
- Mr James Dallas

Agenda Item 2. Minutes & Actions Arising

The minutes of the 25 June 2019 YVF meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting. Members noted that the minutes of meetings will now be placed on the [DVA website](#). Members agreed to close all action items, with the exception of item 126, this will be put on the agenda for the first meeting of 2020.

Agenda Item 3. Member submission – Time taken to process individual claims and PI

The concern raised by *The Warriors Return* is that PI is taking too long to process; they are currently being told that they (DVA) are 16 weeks behind. Members discussed the issues around PI which included veterans having to go back to specialists multiple times. It was noted that the process can be detrimental to veterans and complex cases are even more difficult.

Members were advised that Combined Benefits Processing arrangements allows a single delegate to take responsibility for the “whole” claims process. It was noted that advocates could support the delegate in this situation.

A number of other initiatives are being worked on including with Defence to help streamline the process, but there is still work to be done.

Agenda Item 4. Phoenix Australia

Dr Mark Hinton and Ms Nicole Sadler provided members with an update on the progress of the work being undertaken by [Phoenix Australia](#) along with the [Treatment Research Collaboration](#) which aims to improve mental health outcomes in veterans by conducting and facilitating innovative clinical intervention research into PTSD and other complex military mental health issues.

Ms Forbes also provided an update on the Centenary of ANZAC Centre which is a DVA funded initiative run in partnership with Phoenix Australia. Priorities for the next 6 months include continuing to work with Open Arms, Engaging with ESO's and to digitise training courses.

Dr Hinton explained that there are currently 16 pieces of research work going on from Phoenix, he explained why research is required and there are many reasons for why research is really important and the impact that can have on the treatment of veterans.



Members were encouraged to continue to contact Phoenix Australia to engage with them in developing strategies for advocates and ex-service organisations assisting veterans, especially with mental health support. Members noted the issues discussed in the presentation.

Agenda Item 5. Secretary Address

The Secretary spoke to members and provided an update on where DVA is at and where the Department is heading. The Secretary provided an update on MyService and it was noted that there are now over 100,000 registered users on MyService who have submitted over 69,000 claims. MyService is making it simpler and faster to claim. There has been an improvement in acceptance of claims with well over 85% of claims now being accepted through MyService. DVA has also seen an 83% growth in the number of claims for the Department for just MRCA alone. DVA is also seeing double the number of conditions per claim, along with growth in the number of VEA claims, which is at 54%. This has been unexpected as it was anticipated to decrease.

The Secretary noted that she would like to close the gap between the veterans that DVA knows about and the veterans that DVA does not know about. VCR was helping to do this, but DVA needs to be doing this faster and more efficiently. The Secretary advised members that she is very proud of what DVA is achieving, but knows more needs to be achieved.

Members also received an update on the Veterans Recognition Package. This is the most important piece of legislation put forward by DVA. This is about every Australian recognising military service. Members also received an update on the planned inclusion of a Veteran Identifier in the 2021 Census and Aged Care Census. The Secretary closed by informing members that DVA is changing, and DVA is listening and changing.

Agenda Item 6. Open Arms Update

Dr Stephanie Hodson, National Manager of Open Arms and Nicole Pollick, Director of National Operations presented this item. Open Arms is currently engaged with developing new initiatives, research projects and program pilots.

Two Stepping Out initiatives for veterans and their partners focusing on resilience and mindfulness, which commenced in May 2019, are:

- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MSBR) Program Pilot.
- The Resilient Mind Program Pilot.

Open Arms ran a 20-participant pilot initially in Melbourne, due to low numbers (only nine completed the course) it was agreed that two more pilots would be run in Adelaide and Perth. These programs will commence in October 2019 through to December 2019 with an evaluation report expected 30 March 2020.

Another initiative includes the Post War Survive to Thrive Nation Online Coaching Program (Survive to Thrive STTN) Pilot. The STTN program was designed by a former veteran with lived experience. The program provides an emphasis on early intervention and access to computer/online facilities where modules can be completed at a time that is convenient for the client. There are currently 175 veterans enrolled in this program, 300 participants is the required target number. Excellent feedback has been received to date. Outcomes from STTN are due to be released March 2021 but it is likely they will be released before then.



Members asked how people could get involved: details are available on the Open Arms website.

<https://www.openarms.gov.au/>

Agenda Item 7. Member submission – National Defence Asbestos Building, Ship and Contaminated Land register

Members noted the member submission that raised the concept of a National Asbestos building, ship and contaminated land register. DVA does not hold a definitive or comprehensive list/register of locations of asbestos. DVA does approach Defence on a case-by-case basis and Defence does have a program for people concerned by asbestos exposure, they can be contacted on 1800 333 362, details are also on the DVA and Defence websites:

<https://www.defence.gov.au/whs/programs/asbestos-exposure-evaluation-scheme.asp>

<https://www.dva.gov.au/factsheet-dp13-asbestos-screening-program>

Agenda Item 8. Member submission – Inequity of Funeral Benefits under the VEA, MRCA & DRCA

Members noted the member submission on the inequity of funeral benefits across the three different schemes each with different benefits and eligibility.

Members were advised that under the VEA the payment is lower, but is more broadly available and paid as a lump sum of \$2,000. It was asked if this amount is extended to War Widows.

Under MRCA/DRCA, the benefit is higher, but less commonly available and paid by way of reimbursement, up to \$12, 270.59. These differences reflect the purpose of the payments.

All DVA benefits are based on legislation, and as the Secretary explained this can be hard to change, it is out of the Departments hands.

Members noted that the alignment of these benefits is currently under consideration by the Government as part of the Productivity Commission's review.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
136	DVA to confirm if under the VEA the funeral benefit extends to War Widows	Veronica Hancock

Agenda Item 9. Member submission – Veterans in custody

Member Chris Tilley provided a presentation on the Veterans Support Group (VSG).

Chris explained that VSG was established as a small independent pilot project at Mobilong Prison in SA (where Chris works as a Custodial / Recreation Officer), to provide support, advice and information on how to connect to services for veterans pre and post release. It is not a psychological therapy group. The VSG aim is to help to get ESO's into the system as the assistance needs to start from inside and that a prisoner can transition into the community with support networks in place.

Chris would like to see Veteran Liaison Officers to become the norm like Ministers and Aboriginal Liaison Officers.

Chris would now like to see the VSG develop from a pilot program to a state-wide DCS Veteran Support program. It is now at a point where a separate funded position is required as it is difficult to do as part-time position on top of his everyday job.

The challenge continues to be at state level as this is the jurisdiction for incarceration.



There continues to be a range of state issues (including incarceration) that may not be seen as a priority. Members thanked Chris for his presentation and for the work that he is currently doing in SA.

Agenda Item 10. Transformation Update including the Veterans Recognition Project

Ms Lyndall Moore, A/g Assistant Secretary Portfolio Management presented this item.

Members were provided with an update on the DVA Transformation progress as we move into the third year of the program. Year 3 of the transformation program will focus on delivering better experiences for veterans and their families, our staff and our provider community.

Members were also provided with an update on the website improvement project. A new Beta website has been released to be tested by the veteran community. The primary objective of the project is to provide future and current DVA clients with access to relevant, accurate and easily understood information. Changes to the website will occur over the coming months as engagement and feedback flows into the process.

The MyService team are currently working on Lighthouse 2, which is looking at ways to make MyService better for both DVA clients and staff; they are also looking at how processes can be further streamlined through automation.

The DVA telephone system is also becoming simpler and more intuitive moving towards a single contact number and the use of open speech voice technology, which is directing more calls automatically. Members also received an update on the Veterans' Recognition program (VRP); members noted that the Covenant is supported by the VRP, which includes the Veteran Card, a Lapel Pin for both Veterans and Reservists and the introduction of an Oath. The Veterans' Recognition Bill is expected to be passed through the House of Representatives in the next sitting period. A dedicated website will be made available when the VRP is officially launched.

Members did raise some concerns when using/registering on MyService, these will be passed onto the MyService Team.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
137	Provide Ms Lyndall Moore with member concerns around delegates using MyService. It is common for Veterans to have a delegate appointed and this can then change without warning. When registering for the VRP an idea would be a "pop up" advising "Next Steps, timeframes and where to go if it has not occurred within timeframes"	Lyndall Moore

Agenda item 11. Productivity Commission (PC) Report Update

Mr Neil Bayles, Special Advisor, Productivity Commission Taskforce presented this item. Mr Bayles explained to members that there have been PC reports in the past that have never been responded to by Government; it is believed the Government will respond to this one and they want to listen to the veteran community.

The Government will finalise its response to the PC report in conjunction with the Transition Inquiry review and the Advocacy Study review.

A number of the issues raised in the PC report are very complex and will require significant investment and investigation. There are also a number of recommendations that go across a broad range of issues and will take time for the Government to formulate a position and take into account costs.



Government has been consulting with the veteran community to obtain its views and there is general support for the reform of the veteran system. Opposition to particular recommendations includes the proposed Veterans Services Commission and restrictions on future Gold Card eligibility.

Agenda item 12. Mental Health Strategy Update

Ms Moira Campbell, Assistant Secretary, Wellbeing Policy presented this item.

The paper was taken as read with a number of key items being highlighted.

In August, the Minister held a drop-in session at his MP office encouraging MP's and Senators with lived experience to raise issues and ideas. DVA also had an on-line presence seeking input from interested stakeholders, 222 responses have been submitted to the on-line survey, with most respondents being aged 35 years.

Ms Campbell sought member's views on how DVA can better engage veterans in the younger age brackets.

Members advised that many young younger veterans (under 24) would not engage as they are probably still serving; ForceNet could be used to communicate with current serving members. The Overwatch Australia Facebook page is also another option.

It was also noted that EY undertook an environmental scan of current mental health policy settings and program developments both in Australia and internationally. The Environmental Scan has been published on the DVA website: www.dva.gov.au/nap2019

Member also noted that a co-design session was held with approx. 40 people where the group considered a number of guiding principles. The day also confirmed the need to focus on the four critical priority areas being health care, transition, partnerships and communication and education. Suicide prevention was also added as a priority. Outcomes from this session will feed directly into the draft Strategy and National Action Plan.

Agenda Item 13. Cross-jurisdictional issue – homelessness, public housing & incarceration

Ms Moira Campbell, Assistant Secretary, Wellbeing Policy presented this item.

Homelessness – is a complex issue and there is no single source of data. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) summary report and Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report were published on 16 August 2019. Different methodologies were used for each research activity, offering valuable insights from different perspectives on contemporary veterans (2001 – 2017). The AIHW full report will be released at the end of November 2019.

Members advised that ex-serving members are less likely to reach out for help and are trained to sleep rough so it is an easier path for them.

Public Housing - It was acknowledged that states and territories are primarily responsible for delivering housing and homelessness services. DVA has been working with service providers to increase awareness of the veteran system and support available to veterans

Incarceration – DVA does not currently have robust data at a national level.

DVA continues to seek cooperation and collaboration from the states and territories in identifying incarcerated veterans and identifying sources of data that can be used to undertake potential research projects around this issue and to informing policy and program design.

Members acknowledged the great work being done by Chris Tilley in SA.



Agenda item 14. Other business

The Chair sought reflections and thoughts from members about the day. Positive feedback was received from all and members found that by having more member submissions allowed for issues to be put on the table for discussion, noting that updates from DVA are also important in understanding what is going on.

Meeting close

The Chair thanked all members for their attendance and participation. The first meeting of 2020 is yet to be confirmed. The meeting closed at 4pm.