

MINUTES OF THE 20 JUNE 2024 VETERAN, VETERAN FAMILY AND VETERAN SUPPORT COMMUNITY ISSUES MEETING

Co-Chair: Greg Whitehouse. Chair of the Board at VESPIIA, Veterans, Emergency Services, Police and Industry Institute of Australia

Co-Chair: Ian Lindgren. Chairperson Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association

OPENING

The meeting opened at 1202 pm and it was noted that there were thirty-one attendees representing the scope of the organisation in the name of the meeting and listed at Annex A.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting were delivered in a LinkedIn Post and website page. These can be read the following links:

- **Linked In** >[Link](#)<
- **Website Page** >[Link](#)<

GENERAL BUSINESS

Greg Whitehouse made the following statement that defined the aim of the meeting:

- **Aim of the Meeting.** By 1 August 2024 to define and understand the most pressing veteran, veteran family community and veteran support network needs to present them to DVA in a manner that is sufficiently compelling it leaves no option but to resolve them.
- **Working Together.** That our activity is not a DVA bashing activity; rather it needs to be balanced, so the Commonwealth Government and our community can work together.
- **Approach.** The approach will be to identify the top ten issues and then review the top five.
 - With assistance of the veteran community, we will ask for volunteers to write papers for DVA.
 - That papers will then be given to the Secretary of DVA and Deputy Secretaries and Commissioners.
 - All recipients will be invited to the August monthly meeting.
 - DVA Deputy Secretaries have expressed an intent to solve as many of the issues as are possible.

Speakers

- 1215 – 1230: David Ballantyne and Sian Ballantyne – CEO and National Community Manager respectively at Homefront Australia
- 1230 – 1240: Founder Hayley Ann Boswell – Defence Kidz.
- 1240 – 1250: GP Specialist Dr Kerry Summerscales CSM
- 1250 – 1300: Martin Shaw – President at Wounded Heroes Australia.
- 1300 – 1310: Dr William Vass - Audiologist

THE KEY POINTS FROM THE SPEAKERS

David Ballantyne and Sian Ballantyne.

- We have arguably the highest quality veteran healthcare system globally; however, the slowness and difficulty of the claims process places significant strain on veterans and their families.
- Homefront maintains a solid relationship with DVA, reflecting good business practice. Yet, this partnership does not alleviate the usual bureaucratic delays experienced with DVA.
- Outstanding payments exceeding 60 days lead to increased operational costs when working with DVA. Unlike other clients who adhere to clear payment terms, DVA's payment process is notably different and challenging.
- Engaging with DVA incurs more expenses compared to other entities. Delays in payments necessitate engaging additional staff solely dedicated to processing DVA invoices due to the process being so different from anyone else.
- Implementing Commonwealth Terms or defined DVA terms for payments would streamline operations and enhance efficiency.
- At some time in a business's life, it becomes essential to evaluate the feasibility of continuing business with DVA. While the individuals at DVA are compassionate and well-intentioned towards veterans, the lack of focus on outcome-driven processes poses challenges.
- One possible solution could be to establish a service provider panel to leverage influence in urging DVA to align payments with commercial terms specified in contracts or in accordance with finance policy standards.

Hayley Ann Boswell

- The policy of Open Arms to exclude counselling for children under five years old disproportionately affects one of the most vulnerable age groups.
- Open Arms' restriction on interviewing children under sixteen years of age without a parent present poses challenges, especially when the parent is involved in the issue, potentially hindering the child's ability to communicate openly.
- There is a pressing need for funding to support research into the impact of military service on children and families, allowing for informed identification of their specific needs. Relying solely on surveys is becoming less effective due to survey fatigue among participants.
- Defence and veteran children demonstrate higher rates of mental health issues compared to the general population.
- It is advocated for Defence and Veteran children to be formally recognised as such upon enrolment in schools, ensuring tailored support and understanding of their unique circumstances.
- A comprehensive nationwide policy encompassing aged care, health, and overall well-being, with a specific focus on children, is encouraged.
- Ian Lindgren's late notification raises concerns about adult children of veterans who may suffer trauma due to a lack of understanding about service standards.
- Collaboration between childcare providers and healthcare professionals is essential for addressing the needs of Defence and Veteran children effectively.

GP Specialist Dr Kerry Summerscales CSM

- The pressures on GPs to move away from DVA continue with low fees and high overheads to invoice DVA because it has its own unique process that requires larger practices to bring on additional staff. At some point DVA ceases to become a charity that we give our time to. We will need to take the TRN process up again offline after speaking with others.
- Ian Lindgren stated he would bring it to Teena Blewitt's attention, and he emphasised that he does not feel it will resolve itself unless the review process includes GPs, all other affected, and a veteran for stakeholder engagement.

Martin Shaw

- Martin outlined how busy his charity has become and described some of the relationships he has with groups of veterans so we all can work together to help veterans and veterans families in crisis.
- Ian Lindgren confirmed that Wounded Heros Australia works rapidly, and it is a recommended relationship to set up.

Dr William Vass

- Dr Vass had technical issues coming onto the call, however in a statement to Ian Lindgren he advised that Audiologists have issues with TRNs in terms of gaining a time extension and a number of other processes that were used within the audiologist profession.

Key Open Discussion Points

The primary focus on preventing veteran suicide through claims processing and other interactions remains the top priority. However, there are limited incentives for service providers to collaborate with the DVA due to various challenges:

- Veteran cards are becoming less accepted.
- Many veterans in Darwin and other centres such as Toowoomba must travel interstate for treatment unless they cover the costs themselves.
- The low fee schedule, coupled with complex invoicing processes, leads to increased administrative burden for service providers.
- Disputes with DVA over invoicing further strain relationships, with issues often left unresolved.
- Suggestions for improvement by Ian Lindgren have been accepted by the leaders in DVA, but it is his opinion that they are not well accepted below that level. No one should be phased by this because it is a normal human reaction, however he is of the opinion that it will never be resolved until all stakeholders meet and resolve issue after issue. It can be done.
- Adopting prompt payment terms for invoices could alleviate financial strains on providers.
- Late payments from DVA have created financial difficulties for businesses across various sizes and industries.
- Fear of retribution deters small businesses from voicing concerns, impacting their sustainability.
- DVA's stance often clashes with providers, impeding constructive dialogue and it is likely that the providers take a similar stance and goodwill needs to be extended by both parties to resolve..
- Consideration of a class action lawsuit involving veterans and families to address systemic issues has been proposed.
- Incremental, collaborative steps to tackle problems have been recommended by Ian Lindgren to facilitate resolution.
- The cumulative debt owed to all service providers by DVA raises concerns about financial stability.
- A comprehensive approach addressing all issues incrementally is vital to incentivise providers to continue working with DVA.

Papers for DVA

The following people volunteered to write papers:

- Jess Sullivan
- Guy Richardson (an absentia)
- Donna Manton only in desperation.

It was agreed that these would be written by end July and presented to DVA in the hope that some solutions can be forthcoming by end July and other that are feasible in the August Meeting.

MEETING CLOSURE

The Meeting was closed at 1420 hrs, and it was agreed that the successive meeting would run for two and a half hours on 25 July 2024.



Greg Whitehouse
Co-Chair
27 June 2024



Ian Lindgren
Co-Chair
27 June 2024

List of Attendees

Name	Organisation
Abbey Hicks	Villy Community Darwin
Beck Langford	
Cath Allen	RSL Lifecare
Dan Fortune, DSC and Bar	Australian Special Air Service Association
David Ballantyne	Homefront Australia
Dean Davies	Member of the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Donna Manton	
Dr Kerry Summerscales	
Greg Whitehouse	Veterans, Emergency Services, Police and Industry Institute of Australia
Guy Langford	
Haley Ann Boswell	Defence Kidz
Heather Lattimer	Villy Community Darwin
Ian Lindgren	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Jacqui Van de Velde	
Jeremy Stredwick	Australian Commando Association ACT
Jess Sullivan	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Kim Shaw	Wounded Heroes
Lidia Hall	Resolute Ready
Malina Rumble	
Mark Leatham	Frontline Mental Health
Martin Shaw	Wounded Heroes
Michael Handley	REDSIX
Mick Travers	United Nations and Overseas Policing Association of Australia
Miranda Van Hoof	Associate Professor Miranda Van Hooff is an experienced research scientist specialising in the mental health
Nigel MacIntosh	Provocatus
Nina MacKenzie	RSLQLD
Pat McCabe	TPI Federation
Paul Broadbridge	APOD
Paul Copeland	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Pauline Ryan	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Rachel Handley	REDSIX
Ramon Fenton	Women Veterans Network Australia
Rhonda Vanzella	
Sandi Laaksonen- Sherrin	
Sherry Baxter	
Sian Ballantyne	Homefront Australia
Susan Hammond	VBA Legal
Tara Belton	CEO of RLSA/NT

THE TOP ISSUES

Pri 1: Claims being processed in a humane a rapid way.

Pri 1: Act to have veteran cards accepted everywhere. This is larger than just paying people more and involves asking “what can the Commonwealth do to have you back caring for veterans.”

Pri 1: To raise the DVA Fees schedule so it is in line with others or above it. This includes having a fair and transparent way of setting specialist fees

Pri 1: To seek effective governance across all aspects of DVA deliverables that are provided external to DVA by ESOs and other organisations related to providing services to veterans, their families, and the support network.

Pri 2: To resolve the inadequacies in invoice payments so invoices are paid on commercial terms to government standards which is 5 days if submitted by online portal, and 20 days for others.

Pri 2: To have medical help available much faster, e.g. 30 days for a psychiatrist through Open Arms is poor.