Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table September 2026

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Wednesday, 23 September 2026 and discussed the following matters.

DVA update – Secretary Alison Frame

The Secretary described DVA's focus on presumptive liability and prioritising treatment outcomes, and updated ESORT members on key developments including the progress made on implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, recent announcements and claims processing data.

The Secretary also outlined her concerns about the increasing level of abuse directed at DVA staff and the negative public narrative that undermines veterans' confidence in seeking support from the Department.

Royal Commission Recommendation 89 Update – Peak Body

Mr Nick Booth updated ESORT members on the recommendations of his report on the ESO Peak Body, including proposed governance and funding arrangements. Consistent with Recommendation 89 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, Mr Booth sees that the Peak Body will support stronger collaboration, coordination, capability development and collective impact across the veteran-serving sector.

Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency

ESORT members welcomed Brendan Cox, the inaugural Chief Executive of the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, who presented on the founding

principles, early development and operational priorities of the agency. Mr Cox emphasised that the agency works to support and collaborate with ESOs – not replace them – and link them to veterans and families in need. He answered questions and appealed to members to engage with the agency, share information about their services and connect with local Hubs.

Official Historian

Professor Craig Stockings, the Official Historian of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and Peacekeeping Operations in East Timor, briefed ESORT members on the official history project, including progress, successes and outputs to date, and remaining challenges. Professor Stockings stressed the importance to and impact of these 6 official histories on the veteran community, as well as the complexities, sensitivities and negative consequences of the long delays in the clearance process preventing the publication of the remaining 5 volumes. Members voiced support for a concerted effort by interested ESOs to advocate for the completion of project.

Veterans Review Board Appeals update

Members thanked Jane Anderson and Katrina Harry from the Veteran Review Board, who presented on the functions and processes of the board as the first tier of review of decisions by the Repatriation Commission. They emphasised the board's expanded remit and significant growth in the number and complexity of cases it reviews, and outlined the changes expected from the improved MRCA. More than 80% of disputes are resolved through the alternative dispute resolution process, while the consistency of outcomes in the board's decisions and low appeal rates over time indicate a robust independent system of review.

Trust in DVA

ESORT engaged in a broad discussion on the question "What can VSOs do to help the broader veteran community sustain trust in DVA?", stimulated by the now rescinded proposal for an allied health monetary threshold. Members put forward ideas about how veterans and their organisations could support DVA staff to do their job in a professional manner; raised issues with how negative experiences with DVA processes and DVA-funded medical treatment affect

veterans' trust; suggested ways the service of veterans could be better recognised; and recommended enhanced communication of accurate, accessible and timely information. They also expressed strong solidarity with DVA's stance on respectful behaviour towards its staff. RSL Australia undertook to pursue its recommendations directly with the ESO members of the group.

DVA AI Updates

DVA updated members on the progress of its APS-leading artificial intelligence initiatives since the March 2026 ESORT meeting, including an early evaluation of the Claims Document Reader pilot with RSL Queensland, OneChat, Microsoft 365 Copilot and GovAI Chat beta access. Members noted that these initiatives are intended to improve productivity, access to trusted information, service delivery and staff capability, reducing duplication and administrative effort while retaining close human oversight.

DVA's AI Policy sets out principles, risk-management approaches and approval processes to guide AI investigation, evaluation and implementation, and aligns with Australian Government policies, frameworks and industry best practice. Privacy, security, transparency, informed consent, governance, accountability and human oversight are central to DVA's approach. Decisions about veterans' claims, payments and entitlements continue to be made by authorised staff. DVA undertook to keep members regularly informed of progress and welcomes their ongoing input.

ESORT Member Submissions

Allied Health Measure (Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia VVAA)

In response to the member submission from the VVAA, DVA advised members that the Australian Government has decided not to proceed with the proposed annual monetary threshold for DVA-funded allied health services that was due to commence on 1 July 2027 while retaining increased fees for providers, implementing ICT enhancements, and continuing to welcome input on how services for veterans can be improved.

Veteran Advocacy (VVAA)

In response to the VVAA submission, members noted the establishment of the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy as an independent professional body for compensation and wellbeing advocates and welcomed its CEO, Alana Scheiffers, who outlined membership options and encouraged direct engagement by ESOs. DVA advised that it will provide funding to the institute and is working with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs on proposed legislation to give effect to the Government's response to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee report on veteran advocacy services.

Unprocessed Claims (VVAA)

In response to the VVAA submission, DVA advised that it remains focused on improving claims processing times, and in particular complex permanent impairment claims. DVA is progressing reforms to simplify claiming, reduce administrative burden and improve the veteran experience, including through the VETS Act reforms, expanded digital lodgement through MyService, earlier engagement with veterans and representatives, and improved front-end screening to identify missing information.

In 2025–26, DVA made a record number of decisions on veterans' health conditions despite continued growth in demand. Claims are generally processed in order of receipt, but DVA can prioritise claims where there is evidence of significant vulnerability or immediate need, including terminal illness, acute mental health concerns, homelessness, severe financial hardship. DVA has also published new factsheets on the simpler claims system and claims processing improvements.

DVA Initiatives

Medicinal Cannabis Prescribing Behaviours

Changes to the Medicinal Cannabis Framework came into effect on 16 February 2026, national guidelines were published in August 2026, and the grandfathering arrangement ended on 1 September 2026. Peak professional bodies have been broadly supportive, while complaints have largely been limited to industry representatives and businesses built on telehealth models of

care. DVA is monitoring prescribing patterns, with early data indicating a shift consistent with expectations, although it is too soon to confirm statistically significant trends. DVA-commissioned guidance materials from the University of NSW are available on the DVA website.

Veterans' Chaplaincy

The Archdeacon to Veterans, Andrew Nixon, briefed members who endorsed the Veterans' Chaplaincy Program, which provides trusted, non-clinical pastoral and spiritual support for transitioning and at-risk ADF personnel and their families, including support for suicide prevention, postvention and moral injury. The program meets a compelling need and is delivered by experienced former and reserve ADF chaplains who support warm handovers to Defence and community services, and work alongside clinical and community providers. Funding has been extended to 30 June 2028, and in May 2026 a specialist chaplain was added to support Special Forces veterans and others affected by related investigations. ESOs are encouraged to raise awareness of the program, nominate veteran-friendly chaplains, align referral pathways and embed chaplaincy within local veteran support networks.

Presumptive Liability

ESORT members were briefed on the implementation of a new pathway of presumptive liability, introduced on 1 July 2026 as part of the VETS Act. The pathway recognises that some conditions have a well-established connection to service and may make the claims process faster and simpler for veterans by reducing the investigation needed for eligible conditions. Members discussed the potential for further presumptive conditions to be added and DVA advised that investigations into some of these are continuing.

MyService is able to identify conditions that may satisfy presumptive liability criteria and bundle them for assessment, making it easier for a DVA delegate to assess and accept eligible conditions. To receive the full benefit of the streamlined process, veterans are encouraged to provide a confirmed diagnosis and all requested supporting evidence when lodging their claim. While DVA may seek further information where required, complete claims can generally be assessed more quickly and efficiently.

ESORT Members in attendance:
Chair
Repatriation Commissioner
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
Air Force Association **(virtual) (proxy)**
Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Australian Special Air Service Association
Defence Families Australia
Defence Force Welfare Association
Defence Reserves Association
The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Legacy Australia Inc
MRCC Member, Department of Defence
MRCC Member, Department of Defence
MRCC Member, Comcare
Naval Association of Australia
Returned and Services League of Australia **(virtual)**
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Soldier On
TPI Federation Australia
Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia
Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Women Veterans Australia Ltd
Apologies:
Air Force Association
Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner