



Advocacy News

Issue 14 – April 2020

Welcome to the first edition of the *Advocacy News* for 2020.

1. A message from the Chair

As with just about every organisation the current COVID–19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the conduct of the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP). The Capability Framework Management Group (CFMG) Chair, Mr Roger Greene has recently issued an ATDP Update on the impact of coronavirus on the ATDP and our responses to this constantly evolving and once in a lifetime challenge. I commend him for his strong leadership and comprehensive response to the current situation. The information which I include, partly verbatim, in my message is worth repeating in this wider forum as it addresses all the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) we are receiving from the advocacy community around the scheduling of ATDP programs, the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program and other related matters.



Firstly as you would expect in the circumstances as an initial response **all ATDP programs scheduled between now and 31st May are postponed until further notice. This will be reviewed on 30th April and a further update provided.**

Clearly the National strategy to contain the Coronavirus presents an impediment to the program that we had planned moving forward. However it also presents us with an opportunity to get some other important work done. In the coming weeks Roger, along with his hard working team, including our National Training Manager, Greg Hoving and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Team Leader, Brett Warner, and the Regional Managers will be looking at changes we need to make to the program to allow advocates, on the training pathway in particular, to progress their knowledge and experience during the temporary absence of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Consolidation and Assessment (C&A) programs.

The ATDP Training Team understands the obstacles that the present situation presents for advocates wishing to progress from Level 1 to Level 2 and who are enrolled for postponed C&A programs. On the recommendation of Regional Mentors, affected Level 1 candidates may be considered by the Training Team for the granting of early access to Level 2 eLearning material (that is before completing Level 1 C&A). We are also working on arrangements for conducting the C&A training and some assessment elements remotely to assist those affected by Level 1 and 2 C&A program postponement.

Brett and other members of the CPD team will be seeking assistance from Trainers and Assessors and experienced advocates in writing further quizzes and case studies particularly for Wellbeing and Level 3 Compensation Advocates. There is also a body of work to be completed by Subject Matter

Experts in preparation for moving into Year 3 of the CPD program in July 2020. This work includes developing more quizzes and case studies and the further development of CPD activities for Level 3 and 4 Compensation Advocates. Should you have the time and expertise to help please contact the ATDP at web.atdp.org.au/contact.php with relevant details of your background and capacity to assist with this project.

It is suggested, given the current pandemic, that it would be valuable for all Advocates to complete the COVID-19 online training session that is presently offered by the Department of Health. It takes about 20 min to complete and affords a good overview of managing the health requirements and explaining the Virus.

There is no cost involved, work area and qualification are classed as 'Other' and you can print out a certificate at the end. Because of the importance of infection control we are considering allocating CPD points so keep an eye on the CPD 'pre-approved activities' list.

The link is www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training

ESOs and advocates should be aware that DVA has issued a special COVID-19 edition of the e-news which forms part of its commitment to keeping the veteran community and the Australian public informed as the crisis evolves. Between editions of e-news and *Vetaffairs*, you can check the DVA website, including the Latest News for Veterans page for updated information.

For the foreseeable future there are going to be global challenges the like of which we have not known before. Times like these tend to put things in perspective. At this difficult time I would like all the Advocacy Community to know that the wellbeing of your families and local communities is top of mind for both myself and all the dedicated ATDP volunteers. I would like to again thank them for continuing to so generously offer up a large amount of their time to running the program and their tireless work to adapt it to meet the constantly evolving challenges that are part and parcel of the world in which we live.

Please stay safe and look after one another.

Regards

Jenny Walker

Chair, Strategic Governance Board
Advocacy Training and Development Program

2. Australia Day Honours Awards 2020

Two members of the ATDP family were recognised in this year's Australia Day Honours awards.

We have already featured a number of recipients in previous issues and in this one we profile Trevor Plymin and Colin Darts.



MEDAL (OAM) OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA IN THE GENERAL DIVISION

For service to veterans and their families

Mr Trevor PLYMIN OAM JP

Trevor Plymin was awarded his OAM in the Australia Day Honours List 2020 for 'service to veterans and their families'. Trevor served in the RAN from March 1966 to October 1986 and following his naval service he distinguished himself as a Red Cross Team Leader during the Brisbane Floods and Cyclone Yasi.

The list of organisations he's been involved with are many and varied.

His volunteer work includes membership of the DVA Operational Working Party (OWP) since 2017.

Since 2004 Trevor has also been an active member at the Returned and Services League of Australia NSW Branch where he is a volunteer Pensions Officer and advocate. During this time he has also been a treasurer and vice president. Trevor has also been the secretary at the Maclean Sub-branch, project manager at the Townsend Memorial and a Pensions Officer and advocate at the Casino Sub-branch. Since 2016 he has been a volunteer Pensions Officer and advocate with the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' association at the Alstonville Veterans' Advocacy Centre.

His tireless and dedicated work assisting the ex-service community also includes time spent as the NSW TIP Training Coordinator, a TIP Pension Officer Coordinator/Trainer and more recently, from 2016-2018, the ATDP Regional Mentor Coordinator for Region 2.

Trevor currently also volunteers at the Clarence River University of the 3rd Age (U3A) Men's Shed in Townsend. (U3A is a not for profit volunteer organisation, dedicated to life-long learning).

Trevor's previous awards for community service with the Australian Red Cross include a National Emergency Medal, for provision of support in the Queensland floods. These remarkable achievements are a testament to his caring and passionate approach to life. We would like to sincerely congratulate Trevor on behalf of the ATDP, on an extremely well deserved OAM.



MEDAL (OAM) OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA IN THE GENERAL DIVISION

For service to veterans and their families

Mr Colin Darts OAM

Colin Darts was awarded his OAM in the Australia Day Awards 2020 for 'service to veterans and their families'.

Colin arrived in Australia in 1965 at the tender age of sixteen from England. This trip was sponsored by the renowned Big Brother Movement. After a couple of years settling in to his new life in Australia, he joined the Australian Army in 1967 as a radio mechanic which led to him working on all types of aircraft within Army Aviation. Colin served in Papua New Guinea in 1969 and was posted to Vietnam from 1970-1971. After his discharge from the Army in 1973, Colin joined his local RSL in Albury and was subsequently a founding member of the Murray Border Association of Vietnam Veterans in 1979 and continued his involvement with the association until 2016. He has held the



positions of President, Treasurer and Secretary in all these three organisations during his period of membership. He is the current director of the Sailors Soldiers and Airman’s Club in Albury. Other positions held by Colin include the Secretary of the Commercial Club Squash Club for over 20 years and a Deputy fire fighter for the Table Top RFS from 2002-2018. In Colin’s words “Not bad for a Pom”.

When asked about what the award of an OAM meant to him, Colin said,

“he felt very humbled and honoured on receiving such distinguished recognition”.

Colin’s long list of achievements reflect an exceptional passion and commitment to serving others and we would like to congratulate him on behalf of the ATDP on an extremely well deserved OAM.

3.ATDP Training Update

How many Accredited Advocates Are There?

As at 2 April 2020, the ATDP has facilitated 788 advocates obtaining accreditation to be available to help veterans and their families.

Unit of competency	RPL	Training	Total Completed UoCs
Compensation Advocate Level 1 (MILADC001)	15	99	114
Compensation Advocate Level 2 (MILADC002)	370	29	399
Welfare Advocate Level 1 (MILADW001)	20	52	72
Welfare Advocate Level 2 (MILADW002)	345	20	365
Compensation Advocate Level 3 (MILADC003)	74	6	80
Compensation Advocate Level 4 (MILADC004)	13	0	13
TOTAL	837	206	1043

How are we tracking with recent nominations?

January was a relatively quiet month compared to last year. However, the nominations for February picked up and we had a record number come through, 45 in total. Many of the nominations were for the training pathway.

Month	Nominations	In 2019	Average (2017-2019)
January	16	31	26
February	45	38	40

It can take anywhere from a few months to over a year to complete one Unit of Competency, so we will be busy at the end of this year organising Consolidation and Assessment (C&A) Programs for these recently enrolled advocates.

4. Volunteer Information Pack

Purpose of the brochure

Of all the ways we help your ex-ADF mates, these 'hands on' advocacy roles offer a unique opportunity to change lives. If you decide to volunteer, you will join a group of well-trained, highly skilled and committed people who share your passion for assisting veterans and their families in very important ways. You will be helping those who have served, their dependents and those who support them in their day to day lives. Their wellbeing will be both your objective and reward.

There are two advocacy streams known as advocates and advocate support officers. They both work with veterans and their dependents, and war widow(er)s. Our advocates undergo formal training and are accredited upon its successful completion. They connect veterans with wellbeing services or prepare compensation claims and appeals. Our support officers may be trained in a variety of ways but are not accredited. They normally work in conjunction with advocates to triage caseloads and provide support to both advocates and their clients. This support may take many forms and we can discuss how our advocacy support arrangements work when you decide you would like more information from us about specific opportunities we can offer you to help your mates.

This Information Pack outlines broadly what our volunteer advocates and advocate support officers do to assist our members and clients. The brochure can be found on the ATDP website www.atdp.org.au where you can find further information about:

- The benefits of volunteering as an advocate or advocate support officer,
- More about our advocates and advocate support officers' roles,
- What commitments our volunteers are making,
- The training and support we and the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) provide, and
- What insurance cover is provided to advocates by the Veterans' Indemnity and Training Association (VITA)

If you wish to volunteer we would like to hear from you. If you volunteer we will do everything within our power to ensure success in your chosen role.



5. 'NEW' Compensation Support Officers Handbook

A new ATDP Handbook is available, which has been developed to complete the suite of Handbooks available that provide information to volunteers and paid staff of Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) who provide assistance and support to veterans and veteran's families. The other Handbooks in the suite are:



- Rehabilitation and Compensation Advocate Handbook
- Wellbeing Advocate Handbook
- Wellbeing Support Officer Handbook

Compensation Support Officers (CSOs) provide a wide range of valuable support services to veterans and their families, but this does not include providing any form of advice about compensation claims. The types of duties they undertake may include:

- assisting with administrative duties (eg. within the ESO office)
- providing information to clients on sources of information
- undertaking preliminary interviews with clients to ascertain basic service and medical details
- booking medical appointments; and
- ongoing communication and follow-up with clients, DVA, Defence or doctors/specialists

Around one in three of our veterans are not travelling well as a result of their ADF service or transition into civilian life. Volunteering in an advocacy support role is a great way to help them. The role can be arduous but it can also be very rewarding. Remember, not everyone needs to be an accredited advocate, there's plenty of work to be done in a support capacity.

If you would like further information, all of the Handbooks can be found on the ATDP website under *Documents* at: web.atdp.org.au/index.php. There's also plenty of information on the website about the ATDP and the courses that are available.

6. 'New' The Orderly Room



Many of you will be familiar with the Orderly Room blog theorderlyroom.blogspot.com/ that's been a reliable source of information for the veteran community and advocates for many years. The Advocacy Training and Development Program will be moving the Orderly Room onto the new ATDP website at the end of April/early May. Whilst retaining the same name the new blog will be easier to use and offer the opportunity for accredited advocates to post questions or comments about the articles as they appear on our website.

The new blog will be easier to navigate and have a range of search options to enable us to engage directly with the veteran community and accredited advocates accessing the ATDP Website.

We look forward to providing more information to you about the new Orderly Room and how it will work in late-April 2020.

7. Continuing Professional Development

Welcome to the first Advocacy News of 2020 and what a year it's been so far. So much for 20/20 vision. Aligned to the COVID-19 measures there has been the cancellation of ATDP programs but this affords us an opportunity to review CPD and make any needed changes to the program.



At the CPD workshop held in early March 2020 a number of areas were reviewed and identified as needing further work. These are mainly the case-studies and quizzes. The case-studies in particular are subject to comment by advocates, as they should be, and there is a functional need to review them to correct references and information/legislation that may have changed slightly and to improve them where we can. The CPD Team will be approaching Trainers and Assessors and other Senior Advocates for assistance in the further development of CPD exercises.

To progress this, myself and other members of the team will be in touch over the coming weeks to seek assistance in writing further quizzes and case studies particularly for Wellbeing and Level 3 Compensation Advocates. If you are an experienced advocate and would like to be involved please email ATDP Communications and we will contact you. This is rewarding work, but is a hands on role that will require a commitment of your time to help develop activities.

As we are approaching the end of Year 2 of CPD (30 June) advocates should have acquired 15 points (and 30 points for the two years) to remain current against their CPD obligations. By the end of Year 3 (30 June 2021), advocates must have acquired a total of 45 CPD points. And as mentioned in earlier articles the Veterans' Indemnity and Training Association (VITA) have also advised that Level 1 and Level 2 advocates will be specifically excluded from the Schedule to the Policy from 30 June 2020 (3 months' time) where their CPD obligations have not been met.

The statistics show that whilst most advocates are actively engaging with CPD some are yet to commence or complete activities within the CPD module. It is important that advocates keep their skills and knowledge current and CPD is a proven means to ensure that you continue to be abreast of changes and are keeping pace with community expectations in relation to those providing advice to clients.



To assist you with meeting your CPD obligations the ATDP will be phoning advocates from later this month to talk about CPD, what is on offer and what is new, and also to update your details so we have accurate records.

It's a real advantage that the current CPD delivery platform is mainly IT-based so even though there may be a slowdown in non IT-based activities and programs, it would be an optimal time to catch up with CPD online where needed.

Further help? If you are having problems in meeting your CPD obligations or you have any general questions relating to CPD, please contact the CPD Team at cpd@atdp.org.au

Brett Warner
Team Leader CPD

8. Department of Veterans' Affairs Articles

While it is the objective of Advocacy News to provide a forum for practicing Military Advocates it also provides an opportunity for DVA policy areas to disseminate current information about their areas of responsibility. The editorial committee are conscious of the fact that not all DVA policies and procedures are directly relevant to all sections of the advocacy or veteran communities.

Nevertheless, we feel it is important to make as much relevant policy information available as possible in order to help practicing advocates remain abreast of developments in the veteran wellbeing and compensation space.

If you have a constructive comment on any aspect of Military Advocacy, please do take the opportunity share this with us by way of the contact details for ATDP Communications which appear at the end of each issue of Advocacy News.

ATDP, CFMG Chair



9. Do you know veterans who may benefit from aids and appliances?

DVA has a long standing program arrangement (Rehabilitation Appliances Program) to assist veterans to stay independent, active and minimise the impact of an injury and illness.

The Rehabilitation Appliances Program (RAP) provides aids, appliances and services to eligible veterans with a clinical need from:

- walking sticks to wheelchairs and electric scooters,
- continence products, to dignity clothing and personal response systems,
- rails and ramps to stair lifts and bathroom modifications,
- blood glucose monitors to a membership to their local state or territory diabetes organisation.



In fact, every year thousands of DVA clients are provided items and services through RAP. It's easy for a veteran with a clinical need to access an item or service, all they need to do is speak with their GP. Their GP will either prescribe the appropriate item or refer them to another health professional for an assessment.

DVA is committed to supporting veterans through the provision of a range of items and services to help them as they age, to live independently in their own home.

For more information go to the [DVA](#) website or call the DVA general enquires **1800 555 254**.

10. Listen up

If you know of veterans with hearing loss as an accepted condition or hold a DVA Gold Health card, they can get assistive listening devices (ALDs) to help improve their ability to hear in specific situations. DVA provides ALDs at no cost.

ALDs available from DVA include:

- induction loops for providing hearing support in a specific area
- headsets for watching the television
- microphone/FM listening systems
- door bells and smoke alarms with lights
- telephone accessories
- streamers that transmit sound from a mobile phone, tablet or TV to a hearing aid



They can use ALDs in conjunction with hearing aids supplied through the Australian Government Hearing Services Program if they are required. Research has shown that the combination of a radio frequency ALD worn in conjunction with hearing aids provide superior performance in noisy environments and over distances than is possible from any hearing device alone.

Accessing services is easy!

Eligible veterans, widows, widowers and dependants simply need to make an appointment with their hearing provider who will discuss the best ALD options for their hearing needs.

For more information go to the [Assistive Listening Devices](#) page of the DVA website or call **1800 555 254**.

11. New DVA Nominal Rolls Website

On 5 March 2020, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) consolidated its nominal roll websites into a new, single access portal [Nominal Rolls](#)

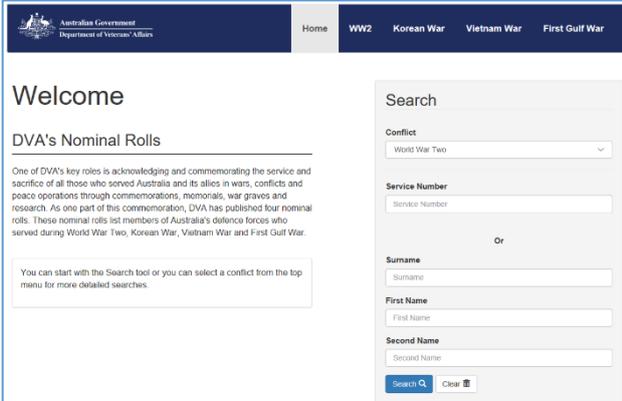
The new website continues to provide information on the service history of members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) who served during World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam War, consolidated into a single location. The new website has an improved look and feel and a much improved search functionality.

To help make the transition to the new nominal rolls website seamless and easy for veterans and their families to use, those accessing the previous websites are automatically redirected to the new site. While we have not experienced any issues with this process, there may be isolated instances where redirection does not occur as expected.

We are writing to agencies and organisations who support veterans and their families to make sure that they are aware of the new website and can support users when needed. It is important to note that some veterans have opted to have their information suppressed from publication, and we are acutely aware of ensuring that these veteran's wishes continue to be honoured. Some may follow up and will require reassurance that we will maintain their requested suppression.

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) continues to manage rolls for personnel who served with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during the First World War and those who served in prior conflicts, including Sudan (1885), the Boer War (1899–1902) and the Boxer Uprising (1900–1901).

The National Archives of Australia also provides the ability to search digital copies of the service records of many Australians who served in the First and Second World Wars.



The screenshot shows the DVA Nominal Rolls website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Australian Government logo and the Department of Veterans' Affairs name. The main menu includes 'Home', 'WW2', 'Korean War', 'Vietnam War', and 'First Gulf War'. The page content is titled 'Welcome' and 'DVA's Nominal Rolls'. A paragraph explains DVA's role in commemorating service and sacrifice. Below this is a search section with a 'Conflict' dropdown menu (set to 'World War Two'), a 'Service Number' input field, and an 'Or' separator. There are also input fields for 'Surname', 'First Name', and 'Second Name'. At the bottom of the search section are 'Search' and 'Clear' buttons.

In the unlikely event that you are contacted to assist with technical difficulties, may we ask that you please suggest that the user update any saved links to the previous nominal rolls websites? If additional assistance is required in using the new website, please do not hesitate to refer veterans and their families to the DVA Nominal Rolls Team using nominal.rolls@dva.gov.au, 1300 780 133, or the Director Nominal Rolls – GPO Box 9998 – Brisbane QLD 4001.

12. The challenges associated with transitioning from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to civilian life

DVA understands the challenges associated with transitioning from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to civilian life, it can be a busy and challenging time for veterans and their families. With many competing priorities to sort out, DVA is committed to prioritising veterans' health by providing veterans with easier access to health care. All ADF members who transition on or after 1 July 2019, who have served at least 1 days' continuous full-time service, can now access a comprehensive fully-funded health assessment from their GP each year for the first five years following transition.



The **Veteran Health Check** is specifically designed for veterans and is designed to support the early detection and intervention of mental and physical health concerns during transition. A *Veteran Health Check* can be accessed through any GP and will assist veterans and their GPs to identify and support the onset of physical and mental health conditions that are common in the years following transition and organise for early and targeted referrals. GPs may also make referrals for additional tests, treatment or assessment by other health professionals, and can refer veterans to relevant DVA services or programs. Veterans' will need a DVA Health Card to access *the Annual Veteran Health Checks*. However, veterans who transitioned from the ADF prior to 1 July 2019 will still be able to access a *One-off Veteran Health Check* from a GP at any time after transition and do not need to be a DVA client to do so.

Make sure to check that your GP accepts DVA Health Cards when making an appointment.

To find out more about Veteran Health Check see: www.dva.gov.au/veteranshealthcheck

13. DVA and Defence to connect with serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families before they leave the ADF

DVA is working closely with Defence to connect with serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families before they leave the ADF. Connecting with serving members ensures they have easy access to DVA services and know what support is available to them and their families before they leave the military. To achieve this, DVA's national On-Base Advisors (OBAS) are changing to Veteran Support Officers (VSOs). The VSOs will provide a greater on-base presence and tailored support to the needs of current serving ADF members and their families, to better prepare them for transition and help them navigate their DVA business.

Since 2011, OBAS has made a significant impact to the lives of veterans and their families by providing high quality service and support. However, as a State-based model, service delivery was not always consistent across the different regions, and between ADF bases. The change to VSOs will adopt a service delivery model that is nationally consistent and accessible on almost all ADF bases around the country, to better support serving ADF members and their families.



The new VSO service delivery model has been designed so that DVA's on base services can be delivered through VSOs at main hubs on larger ADF bases, and smaller offices, or spokes, at surrounding ADF locations. This new model will enable the larger hubs to support the spokes in surrounding locations, so that DVA can be present on more bases and VSOs can meet with more serving members in more locations. In particular, this will enable DVA to proactively make contact with transitioning members before they leave the ADF.

A number of VSOs under the national model have already commenced their work on Defence bases across Australia, with the national rollout to continue over the next 18 months and expecting to be completed by mid-late 2021.

VSOs can conduct member appointments either on base through a face to face appointment, or via a telephone call. If you know any serving members who would like to book an appointment on base with a DVA VSO, please contact VSO@dva.gov.au to arrange an appointment.

14. Heart Health Program

DVA runs a Heart Health Program aiming to help veterans increase physical health and wellbeing through practical exercise, nutrition and lifestyle management support.



The program runs for 52 weeks and includes regular physical activity sessions tailored to the needs and fitness level of participants, and monthly health education modules.

The program covers a range of topics including setting healthy goals, nutrition and healthy eating, physical activity, weight management, chronic conditions, quitting smoking, responsible alcohol consumption, back care, stress management, sleep, healthy ageing and maintaining a healthy heart.

The Heart Health Program is free and is open to all returned veterans and peacekeepers who have not previously participated in the program. All participants require medical clearance from their GP before beginning.

For more information please visit:

www.veteranshearthealth.com.au to check eligibility or call **1300 246 262**.

15. Government Establishes Body to Tackle Suicides

The Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced on 5 February that a powerful, new independent body will be created to investigate all suspected veteran and Australian Defence Force (ADF) suicides and causes.

The National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention will have the enduring power, scope and resources to investigate suicides and related issues as they arise, rather than being restricted by a one-off review looking at past practices.

The Prime Minister said the Commissioner would also have the power to compel witnesses to give evidence.

‘I have thought long and hard about the best response to this issue,’ he said. ‘I have spoken to veterans’ right across Australia and I have met with their families and also local, state and national organisations. I believe what we have developed addresses the needs of those veterans, their families and our serving men and women.’

The National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention will be empowered to perform two roles:

- They will be an independent and permanent public accountability body, with the same powers of a royal commission to compel the production of evidence and summon witnesses, and make findings and recommendations to Government.
- They will also provide an ongoing investigative function of individual cases of suicide, working with each state and territory coronial office, making recommendations to Government.



The Government will invest an initial \$40 million to support the Commissioner’s work and this will be expanded to ensure they have whatever resources they need.

The National Commissioner will also oversee a comprehensive review and analysis of the more than 400 suicide deaths in the Defence and Veteran communities since 2001. This review will have a set timeframe and Terms of Reference. An interim report will be delivered within 12 months, and a final report at 18 months. Families will be engaged in this process if they wish, with an opportunity to participate and tell their stories openly and safely.

A **Veteran Family Advocate** will also be appointed to directly engage with the families of veterans, to improve the design of all veteran programs and services, including mental health supports and services.

The new Veteran Family Advocate will focus on mental health and suicide prevention, and contribute to our understanding of risk factors relating to the wellbeing of veterans and their families, particularly during transition from the ADF. The Advocate will represent the views of veterans and their families by engaging and advocating to help shape policy and the administration of veteran benefits and support.

The Veteran Family Advocate will sit on the Repatriation Commission and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission within the Veterans' Affairs portfolio and will work closely with the National Commissioner and the Prime Minister's National Suicide Prevention Adviser.

A selection process to appoint the Veteran Family Advocate will begin shortly.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling provides support and counselling to current ADF members, veterans and their families and can be contacted 24/7 on 1800 011 046.

16. New DVA Website

The new website is here!

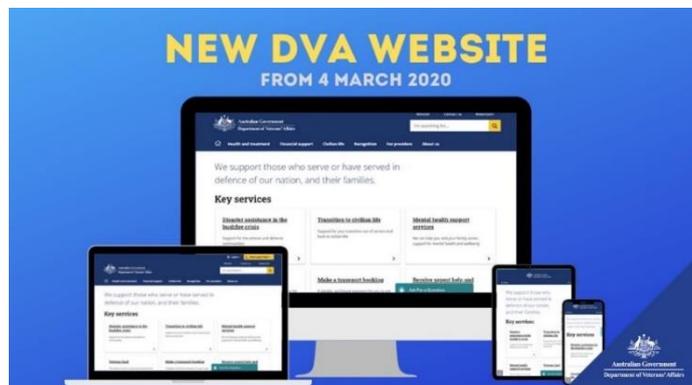
The DVA website has been redesigned based on feedback from our veterans and their families. Launched on 4 March 2020, the new, easier-to-use website is better designed for veterans and their families and now available at www.dva.gov.au

The new site provides information that is simple to find and easy to understand. Our focus was to ensure that all of our veteran community can quickly find the information they need and work out what to do next, such as how to make a claim or gain access to our services and support.

The valuable feedback from the veteran community told us our previous website was too confusing and hard to navigate. We were told it was designed for people who already knew about DVA programs and services and didn't focus on the needs of the user. We listened, and with a clean look and feel the website groups information under five themes: health and treatment, financial support, civilian life, recognition and providers.

More than 200 of the most important or popular pages have been completely rewritten to make them easier to understand. Other information has been transferred to the new website and will be reviewed and updated over time.

Most excitingly, we've improved the search capability and introduced 'Pat' – a digital assistant who can answer your questions and direct you to the information you're after.



You might notice that our factsheets have disappeared. By presenting this information as normal pages on our website we have made it more accessible and easier to read. You can still print this information from the website if you would like a hard copy.

A website is never finished and the department will continue to improve features and update the information on the site. We encourage you to provide feedback on your experience by using the feedback button on the website. The changes to the website do not affect MyService or the availability of existing forms.

Visit the new website today and have a look around – www.dva.gov.au

17. SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE FOR ACCESSING VETERAN HEALTH RECORDS

There have been subtle changes in the way Defence is handling health records in the past months which is impacting the ease in which Advocates and veterans access these files. This guide has been developed in conjunction with Joint Health Command to supplement the information found online at;

<https://www.defence.gov.au/Records/ExService.asp> (for ex-serving members) and at <https://www.defence.gov.au/Records/Employee.asp> (for serving members)

Types of medical records

For Army and Navy veterans, it is important when requesting health records to request both the Unit Medical/Dental Record and the Central Medical/Dental Record. RAAF veterans will only have Unit records.

The original intention of these two records was that CMR/CDR was meant to be the records that held the original referral/records and the UMR/RDR were the duplicate document; this is why the quality is sometimes better. However, experience has shown that the CMR/CDR often contain information that has been 'misplaced' from the UMR/UDR, sometimes as a result of frequently handling and relocation of these files.

While Defence is moving towards a combined e-Health record that will contain medical, dental and psych files, at present a veterans psych record continues to be maintained as a separate file that must be specifically requested from DPSYCH dpsych@defence.gov.au for current serving members. Defence Archives manage psychology record requests for discharged members.

Types of Service and where your request for records should be staffed

With the introduction of the SERCAT Total Workforce Model, there has been growing confusion about who is an active and who is inactive and where the request for records should be sent.

If the member is still serving in the Permanent or Reserve forces – even if they are in SERCAT 2 or the old Standby Reserves and not parading – they are considered to be 'active' members. As such, their medical records MUST be requested through their current (or last) medical centre – irrespective of Service.

If the member has completely discharged from the ADF, they can request their records from Defence Archives directly using the form from the ex-serving member's link at the top of this Guide.



Electronic records

With the digitisation of Defence Health records well under way, the provided records are more likely than not going to be sent via mail on either a CD or thumb drive. The drives will be password protected with the password being emailed to the requesting individual (Advocate or veteran) separately. If you lose the password, there is no way to access the files and after 5 failed attempts the drives will be formatted. It is recommended that you store the passwords with the drives to avoid opportunities for this to occur.

Joint Health Command has been actively retrieving and digitising UMR/RDR's from the regions and these are stored electronically in Objective. The medical centre may need a prompt to check Objective for these records. If you require the members CMR/CDR, the medical centre will need to retrieve the CMR/CDR from Defence Archives (such as CMRs). The medical centre needs to send a PM384 Personal Health Records and Test Material Transit Note (Issue and Receipt Voucher) to adf.records@defence.gov.au to request these. Use these words if you are receiving resistance.

Where to go for assistance;

- JHC.gho@defence.gov.au - Joint Health Command Support at the health facilities
- dpsych@defence.gov.au - Serving psychology records
- adf.records@defence.gov.au - Defence Archives
- standby.reserve@defence.gov.au - Directorate of Contingent Workforce Management – Army (for Army only)
- cma.rfi@defence.gov.au - Career Management Army (they look after all requests for career management Army)

18. Do you have an advocacy story you would like to share?

Do you have a story about how you assisted someone with their claim, or with a wellbeing issue which you would like to share with your fellow advocates? Human interest stories are always the most widely read and if they are related to advocacy, then that's what **Advocacy News** is all about.

If you do we would like to hear from you with a view to publishing your story in this newsletter. We don't need long articles, say up to 400 words, but longer if you want. We will help with the editing and will make sure you are happy with it before we go to print.



The next edition of the Advocacy News will be the July 2020 edition. If you have anything you would like to submit please send it to ATDP.Communications@dva.gov.au by the end of June 2020. Looking forward to receiving your articles.

Ed note; The ATDP reserves the right to publish, or not to publish, individual articles.

19.Feedback

tell us what you **Think**

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions about this newsletter, please send an email to ATDP.communications@dva.gov.au

20.ATDP contact details

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Department of Veterans' Affairs – www.dva.gov.au

21.SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

Please share this newsletter with anyone you know who may be interested. Let us know if you would like to be *added* or *removed* from the distribution list by sending an email to ATDP.communications@dva.gov.au
