



**Australian Government**  
**The Repatriation Commission**

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Mr Les Dwyer  
National Pensions and Welfare Coordinator  
Naval Association of Australia National Council  
PO Box 614  
YANDINA QLD 4561

Dear Mr Dwyer

I am writing to formally advise you that the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) has commenced a Review of DVA-funded ex-service organisations (ESO) Advocacy and Welfare Services (the Review). The Review will be conducted by DVA and is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

There is a clear need for the Review to address the sustainability of the Government-funded programs that support ESO activities in relation to claim and appeal work, ESO services on broader welfare issues, assistance for the national organisational activities of ESOs and the relationship of such programs with the Training and Information Program (TIP). The Review will also look to any possible relationship and synergies with the DVA funded *Veteran & Community Grants Program*.

As part of the Review, DVA is consulting with the ex-service community during October and early November and as an applicant for the previous *Building Excellence in Support and Training* (BEST) grant funding round, I invite the Naval Association of Australia National Council to contribute to the Review by making a written submission.

The Review team is interested in talking to representatives of some ESOs in all States and in some regional areas. To facilitate this I have asked Deputy Commissioners to arrange consultation through Focus Groups.

I have enclosed the Terms of Reference for the Review, the Consultation Framework and a Discussion Paper providing key focus points that could be used to frame your response. However, you should not feel bound to address only those points that have been suggested. The Department is interested in obtaining the widest possible views.

Please email your submission to [best.tip.review@dva.gov.au](mailto:best.tip.review@dva.gov.au) by Friday 6 November 2009 or in writing to:

Review Team  
Review of DVA-funded ESO Advocacy and Welfare Services  
Grants and Bursaries Section  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
PO Box 21  
Woden ACT 2606

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this Review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Rolfe', written in a cursive style.

Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO (Rtd)  
COMMISSIONER

28 September 2009

ENCL

# Review of DVA-funded ESO Advocacy and Welfare Services

## Terms of Reference

### **Content and approach**

The Review of DVA-funded ESO Advocacy and Welfare Services (the Review) will be conducted by David Batchelor and Olivia Witkowski, with advice and support from other departmental officers and will include:

1. reviewing the following programs:
  - a. Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Grants Program,
  - b. Training and Information Program, and
  - c. Veteran and Community Grants Program;
2. conducting the Review in consultation with the ex-service community and other relevant stakeholders;
3. examining current ESO service models in considering future funding models for their delivery of advocacy and welfare services to the veteran community in relation to VEA, SRCA and MRCA entitlements; and
4. identifying interdependencies and interactions of the three programs.

### **Objective**

The objective of the Review is to recommend a program that ensures:

- funding levels enable efficient and effective service delivery;
- the range of items eligible for funding are distinct;
- appropriate services are provided for younger veterans;
- the distribution of available funds is transparent and fair;
- there is no duplication of ESO advocacy and welfare services funded by the Government in individual locations; and
- harmonious working relationships are established and maintained.

### **Key issues**

The following points will also be addressed:

- consideration of the recent recommendations made by Professor Dunt as well as the Government's Election Commitment to establish a public register of ex-service officials and conduct regular surveys of them;
- the impact of rolling *Grants-in-Aid* into BEST in 2009/10;
- the sustainability and scalability of future programs;
- opportunities for ESOs to share resources and work in partnership;
- ensuring the concept of "volunteerism" remains a key theme;
- options and implications for change to funding cycles and length of grant funding periods; and
- the effectiveness and efficiency of DVA administrative arrangements, including grant monitoring and acquittal processes.

### **Key program redesign elements**

The Review will consider previous BEST and GIA grant application processes and outcomes, and incorporate the following items for each recommended ongoing program:

- guidelines, operations and administration, including processes, quality assurance, performance measurement and accountability;
- technology and systems,
- eligibility and assessment criteria;
- client demographics;
- location of ESO, DVA and community support groups;
- items that are currently funded;
- the extent to which all programs are meeting the needs of the key stakeholder groups;
- other DVA programs and sources of support; and
- areas of concern from each of the key stakeholder groups.

In considering any new arrangements, the eligibility criteria and items to be funded under the V&CG Program will be taken into account.

### **Deliverables**

The review team will provide a report with recommendations to the Secretary and the Minister. This will include recommendations for:

- renewed programs that provide appropriate financial support and training;
- sites that would serve as a centre-of-expertise for surrounding more “localised” services, including the nature and extent of technological and administrative needs to support ESO activities;
- streamlined but more rigorous grants application, assessment, contractual and monitoring/acquittal processes; and
- optimal grant allocation timings – that is, frequency of grant Rounds in any given financial year and length of grant coverage (eg one, three, five years).

### **Timeframe**

The Review will commence by end August and will be concluded by mid-December 2009.

### **Governance**

The Review Team will be guided by the National Manager Research, Development and Support on a day-to-day basis. Senior direction will be provided by the Repatriation Commissioner and the General Manager Support Division.

### **Interdependencies**

The Review Team’s analysis will inform the separate consideration being given to the conditions under which the funds remaining from Round 11 will be made available to ESOs within the 2009/10 financial year. The Review Team’s input will be important to the Department making recommendations to the Minister that are not inconsistent with either:

- the decision-making framework applied to Round 11 to date or
- the objectives of the Review.



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Department of Veterans' Affairs

## REVIEW OF DVA-FUNDED ESO ADVOCACY AND WELFARE SERVICES – CONSULTATION WITH THE VETERAN AND DEFENCE COMMUNITIES

### Background

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs has instructed the Department to review advocacy and welfare services available to the veteran community through the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) grants program and the Training and Information Program (TIP) to support the changing DVA client demographic.

The Review will consider recommendations made by Professor Dunt in his *Independent Study into Suicide in the Ex-Service Community* in relation to advocacy and advice services. The Review will also include DVA's Veteran and Community Grants (V&CG) program and take into consideration relevant aspects of the Government's 2007 Election Commitments.

The Minister requested that the Review be completed by mid December 2009.

### Consultation

Given the timeframes for the Review, discussions with the veteran and defence communities will be carefully targeted whilst still ensuring that appropriate consultation occurs.

To support the consultation, a letter will be provided to the following groups outlining the purpose of the Review, together with the Terms of Reference and a discussion paper providing key focus points for feedback and submissions to the Review Team:

- National Presidents of all ESOs;
- ESO Round Table members;
- Key State ESOs;
- National TIP Chair;
- Chair of each State TIP Consultative Group; and
- All BEST Round 11 applicants.

Meetings that will be attended by (or held by) the Review Team include:

- Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters;
- ESO Round Table;
- TIP National Conference;
- Operational Working Party;
- State Consultative Fora as arranged by Deputy Commissioners; and
- ESOs in key regions such as Townsville, North Coast NSW and others as identified by Deputy Commissioners.

The Review will not include direct consultation with individual members of the veteran and defence communities – other than in their role as an ESO service provider

funded under BEST or trained under TIP. V&C grant recipients will also not be included directly in consultations by the Review.

However, notification about the Review will be provided on the Department's website along with the Terms of Reference and the discussion paper. That notification will invite individuals or organisations to make submissions if they wish. Submissions will be accepted electronically to [best.tip.review@dva.gov.au](mailto:best.tip.review@dva.gov.au) or in writing to the Review Team, Review of DVA-funded ESO Advocacy and Welfare Services, Department of Veterans Affairs, Grants and Bursaries Section, PO Box 21, Woden ACT 2606.

There is a range of service models operating that have been set up or are being supported at some level through BEST funding and/or TIP training. To complement the consultation activities, the Review Team will visit a small number of these services, across the range from largely welfare and information provision by volunteers through to salaried claims and advocacy services. This additional process will assist the Review team in better understanding how services are delivered at the moment and where effective approaches and processes might be valuable in structuring the revised BEST and TIP programs.

The Review Team will contact those service providers direct to make arrangements to undertake a location visit, where practicable.

#### **The programs being reviewed**

**BEST grants** provide funding to ESOs to support their advocacy and welfare activities. This may include costs associated with employing advocates, pension and welfare officers, or equipment such as computers, printers and software.

- In 2008-09, more than \$6.168 million was provided to BEST grant recipients, \$4.072 million for Round 10 grants and \$2.096 million in the Capital Equipment Round.
- In 2009-10, \$3.991 million in funding has been provided for Round 11 grant recipients.

The 2009-10 round was oversubscribed by \$5 million. Some 98 applicants were unsuccessful, and of the 182 successful many received less funding than requested given concerns about future scalability and flexibility of the program as it is now being accessed.

**V&C grants** provide funding to community and ex-service organisations to support health and wellbeing initiatives for local veterans, war widows and widowers. The program aims to support activities and services that maintain and improve the independence and quality of life of older members of the veteran community. Projects supported include social excursions, Men's Sheds, Day Clubs, cooking classes, updating facilities at activity venues and health and fitness activities.

There are three rounds of V&C grants each year (March, July and October). The most recent funding round, July, was announced by the Minister on 1 September 2009.

- more than \$1.2 million was provided in the July 2009 round; and
- more than \$1.5 million was provided in the March 2009 round.

The **TIP program** provides training and information to volunteer pension and welfare officers who provide services through ESOs. The aim of TIP is to enable pension and welfare officers to provide the best possible advice to veterans and ex-service members seeking compensation and benefits from DVA. In 2008-09, \$1.6m in funding was provided to the TIP program. There were 174 training courses held nationally with 2,401 participants.



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## **Review of DVA-funded ESO Advocacy and Welfare Services**

### **Discussion Paper**

#### **Background**

As you would be well aware, the nature of the Department's beneficiary population is undergoing change both in terms of the ageing of the veteran population but also at the **same time** the increasing number of younger veterans and serving members needing help.

Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs), through their practitioners, advocates and welfare officers, provide an invaluable service in assisting members of the serving and ex-service communities. There is a clear need for the Review to address the sustainability of the Government-funded programs that support ESO activities in relation to claim and appeal work, and information services on broader welfare issues.

Some ESOs report that it is difficult to attract, train and retain a sufficient number of advocates, and welfare and pension officers to act on behalf of DVA beneficiaries and claimants and to deal with increasingly complex legislation. Accordingly, the Review needs to ensure that the resources that are available are used to best effect. To this end, the Review will consider the potential for collaboration and co-operation between ESOs including the sharing of facilities and resources, being mindful of issues around location eg rural and remote, veteran-specific groups and the relative size of ESOs. The question of what other forms of support are available to ESOs beyond Government funding, must also be a consideration.

It is also very important to ensure that the links between ESO advocacy services and TIP are such that **current and informed advice and support** are available to all DVA beneficiaries and claimants.

The level of administrative rigour that applies to support programs will also be considered. Grant policies and eligibility criteria will be considered in order to enhance grant application lodgement processes and supporting systems including VPAD and other local arrangements. Opportunities to enhance DVA grant assessment and notification processes and systems will also be explored. Overall, attention will be given to quality assurance, better performance measurement, accountability and reporting. The intent is not to make monitoring and reporting processes so onerous that they become a disincentive to applying for program funds.

Rather, it is important in designing the new programs, that the Department can ensure that the objectives of the Review can continue to be met in future years.

The Terms of Reference of the Review outline its objectives, the approach that will be taken and the scope of the Review. In undertaking consultations, feedback is being sought around a number of key focus points, including but not limited to, those outlined in the next two pages.

Any other comments on the Review and any aspect of the operations of the programs will also be welcome.

## **Key Focus Points for Discussion**

### **BEST service delivery models**

- Since BEST was first introduced, ESOs have established various models of service delivery for claims, advocacy and welfare support for the veteran and defence communities. We are interested in views on those models you have experience of or are aware of, including:
  - strengths and weaknesses of those current arrangements;
  - the opportunity for partnerships including the veteran centre approach;
  - scope for joint venture arrangements with other ESOs and /or community organisations;
  - sharing facilities and resources;
  - joint funding approaches to BEST-related activities;
  - meeting the needs of small ESOs and those servicing rural and remote localities;
  - what would be considered appropriate welfare activities; and
  - meeting the needs of veteran-specific groups, eg Indigenous veterans.

### **TIP scope and accreditation**

- The Review is also interested in a number of issues around the TIP program and seeks views on such issues as:
  - training content and delivery;
  - scope for the extension of recent developments in E-learning to expand, strengthen and improve the skills and knowledge basis;
  - accredited representation;
  - opportunities arising out of the evolution of veteran centres eg sharing of highly skilled TIP-trained officers across ESOs;
  - responding to changing demographics including the demands for welfare support (which could include services not provided by DVA);
  - the challenge of working across the VEA, SRCA and MRCA; and
  - the respective contributions of paid and unpaid representatives and the role of volunteers.

## Grant administrative processes

- As well as the construct of the programs themselves, the Review is focusing on administrative practices around grant application and approval processes for BEST, GIA and V&CG and is seeking views on:
  - grant guidelines, application processes and forms, and assessment and notification processes;
  - quality assurance, performance measurement, monitoring and accountability, including acquittal requirements;
  - items that are funded and criteria for eligibility and assessment;
  - the extent to which the programs meet ESO needs and respond to client demographics;
  - duration of grants for example continuation of annual grants versus funding for longer periods of time; and
  - timeframes for and timing of lodgement of grant applications.

## Tools to support grants management processes

- The Review is expected to make recommendations on how both the Department and ESOs can better utilise technology to provide consistent more reliable information about how grant monies are being utilised and what outcomes are being achieved for the veteran and defence communities through BEST, TIP and V&CG. The intention is to streamline assessment and accountability procedures as much as possible; and collect information that can be used to support future ESO applications. Therefore, views are being sought on:
  - the extent to which VPAD is currently used;
  - the need for enhancements to VPAD including reporting and monitoring frameworks;
  - other systems (technology or paper-based) that may be in use;
  - the usefulness of on-line completion and lodgement of forms;
  - on-line data entry of claims and other services information; and
  - opportunities for bringing application and case management processes together through VPAD.



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**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

**REVIEW OF DVA-FUNDED ESO ADVOCACY AND WELFARE SERVICES**

**Cover Sheet for Submissions to the Review Team**

**RESPONSE SUBMITTED BY:**

Organisation Name:  
Address:  
Contact name:  
Contact phone number:

or if by an individual

Name:  
Address  
Contact phone number:

If response is by an organisation

*Have you benefited from the BEST, TIP or V&C programs? If so, which one/s and when.*

If responding as an individual

*Are you involved in the provision of advocacy or welfare services with an ex-service organisation? Please list the services you provide.*

*Are you a volunteer or paid and which organisation/s do you work with?*

*Are you a DVA client?*

*Are you a veteran, current serving member, war widow or widower, or dependant?*