

DVA Issues

A new Minister.

Australia has a new Minister for Veterans' Affairs. It is the Hon Matt Keogh who is also the minister for Defence Personnel. He is the 9th Minister for Veterans Affairs since 2007, that's a new one every 18 months or so.

Matt Keogh was elected Vet Affairs Minister on the 1st June 2022. He was born in Armadale in WA in 1981 and was initially elected to Parliament in 2016.

He attended the University of Notre Dame in WA and obtained a Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in politics and history and a Bachelor of Laws. He worked in Law and served as president of the Law Society of WA until being elected to Parliament in 2016.

He has no military training or experience.



DFRDB UPDATE – September 2022,

Jim Hislop, OAM

In our July 2022 Update we advised that we had requested a meeting with the new Minister, the Hon Matt Keogh MP, to discuss our major concerns with the DFRDB scheme. To which the Minister ultimately agreed. A meeting, to be attended by Herb Ellerbock and me, was arranged in Canberra on 6 September. It was originally scheduled for 60 minutes but subsequently reduced to just 30 minutes.



The meeting took place as arranged. Unfortunately, I tested positive to COVID the day before, so Herb had to manage on his own. While the Minister professed to understand the content of the presentation Herb had prepared, it was clear from his questions there were aspects of the



effect of the legislation he did not understand. The minister also questioned the relationship between DFRDB and Age/Service Pension payments and the cost of our proposals.

As the Minister had requested a copy of the presentation, Herb took the opportunity to include additional details to clarify the matters the Minister had raised. In summary, the hearing we received was as good as, if not better than, expected. We now await the Minister's reply.

Understanding the Concerns

It is essential that everyone gains a proper understanding of what the major concerns with the DFRDB scheme are, so that everyone, who wants to approach or has an opportunity to speak to a Member of Parliament or Senator, conveys the same message. Those concerns are stated in Herb's presentation, the slides for which can be viewed or downloaded [HERE](#).

I found a book called "How to solve 50% of your problems" – so I bought two.

First 'DVA Services' videos launched.

DVA has launched a new series of videos highlighting the various services and support the department offers to the veteran community.

The videos are now available on [DVA TV](#).

One [video](#) is of the experiences of three veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) whose lives have been changed by being provided with highly trained assistance dogs through DVA's Psychiatric Assistance Dogs (PAD) program.



[Another](#) looks at the experiences of Warren – a sergeant in the Royal Australian Air Force and a Defence Service Homes (DSH) Insurance policyholder. On 31 October 2020, Warren and his family were at home when a freak hailstorm hit their Brisbane suburb. While the hailstorm itself and the task of rebuilding were stressful, Warren found making a claim with DSH Insurance to be easy, and the response quick and effective.

DVA TV has been established to raise awareness of the support and services DVA offers, share veterans' stories, and commemorate and recognise their service to our nation.

[Subscribe to DVA TV](#) and be the first to find out about new content.



Free mental health care through DVA.

The past two years have been challenging for all Australians, including Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, veterans and their families and now is the time to make your mental health a priority.

All current and former full-time members of the ADF can get free mental health treatment. So can reservists who have completed disaster relief service, border protection service or were involved in a serious training accident. This is called non-liability mental health care. It means there is no need to prove your condition is related to military service and no need to submit a claim for compensation. It covers treatment for any mental health condition.

All current and former ADF personnel and their families also have access to free and confidential counselling and support through Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling. This life-saving support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling 1800 011 046.

There is further information [HERE](#)

Improve your digital savviness.

There are various initiatives out there designed to improved people's computer skills. This can be very important because if you're not comfortable with computers and being online it can limit your ability to engage with the community and government services.



Even a basic awareness of computers and the digital world can be immensely liberating.



Two government initiatives could be a good place to start: Be Connected, and Tech Savvy Seniors.

Be connected

Be Connected is an Australian Government initiative committed to increasing the confidence, skills and online safety of older Australians. It aims to empower everyone to use the internet and everyday technology to thrive in our digital world.

Its online resources cover:

- being safer while online
- talking to or seeing family and friends who live far away
- finding new friends who share interests and hobbies
- connecting with old friends
- keeping up to date with what's happening in communities and around the world
- shopping and selling online, safely and securely.



Be Connected is not just a website, it's a national movement working across Australia, within communities, to help people with their digital skills. Its Network Partners are the local arm of Be Connected. They offer in-person help and support.



Be Connected also supports families to mentor a relative or friend to help them be more connected online.

If you know someone who could benefit from this service, you will find more information [HERE](#).

Tech Savvy Seniors.

Tech Savvy Seniors is a joint program between Telstra and the NSW, Queensland and South Australian governments. It is intended to help you build the skills and confidence to use computers, tablets and smartphones. It includes free or low-cost face-to-face training, how-to guides and training materials in 15 languages.

Learning online skills will help you:

- keep in touch with family and friends
- access government, health and other essential services
- discover more about the things you love.

There is further information [HERE](#) and an excellent video [HERE](#).

New Gov't to hire more staff/other initiatives to address DVA backlogs.

A key report into the Department of Veterans' Affairs' claims processing system has been made public. Minister for Veterans' Affairs Matt Keogh said the report found 37 initiatives which would improve the department's processes, reducing the wait times for veterans and their families.



“We must reduce this claims backlog,” Minister Keogh said.

- “It simply isn't good enough to have people who have put on a uniform and served our country wait for such a long time to access the support they are entitled to.
- “I believe it's important to be accountable, and to get on with making positive changes as soon as possible – that's why I have asked the department to release the report publicly.
- “We are turning a new leaf here and we want to get on with implementing changes as quickly as possible to improve the wait times for veterans.
- “That means employing more staff in the department and to move away from labour hire so we can build and retain the skills and experience needed to support veterans and their families as they so deserve.
- “We want to alleviate any pressure the veteran community are feeling, and that's why improving DVA's compensation claims and payments processing system is so important.”



In September 2021 DVA commissioned independent consultants McKinsey & Company to examine the claims processing system. McKinsey worked closely with the department, ex-service organisations and other members of the veteran community and considered submissions in their investigation. McKinsey identified 11 priority initiatives and created an implementation plan for the department.

If you've got an hour or so to spare, you can read the full report [HERE](#).

"Some initiatives had not been resourced by the previous government and we are working through those now," Minister Keogh said. "DVA has commenced planning and implementation and is working with government to prioritise further efforts."



Getting ready for a road trip in my Tesla

DVA Pensions.

The vast amounts of money that DVA spends each year supporting veterans is eye-watering. In the 2022 – 2023 budget it was allocated \$11.8 billion.

As at the end of December 2021, there was a total of 338, 004 persons receiving some form of pension from DVA. As you would expect, these numbers are gradually reducing, Australian Defence People have not been involved in a major conflict for some years, and those that had were involved many years previously and are of an age where they are gradually passing away. There is a small increase in those receiving Disability Pensioners that were involved in the Gulf War, Timor and various peace keeping engagements (plus 9.55%) but those who saw service in WW2, Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam have declined (minus 45.53%).



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

DVA PENSIONER SUMMARY



There were a total of 26,921 persons classified as TPI and as you would expect, most of these (18,736) served in Vietnam. 9,363 live in Qld.

There were currently 42,220 ladies receiving a War Widow Pension, 28,760 of whom were married to a service man who served in WW2.

DVA has released a summary of pension trends as at end December 2021, click the pic above for a copy. A small update as at end March 2022 can be found [HERE](#).

DVA Claims.

Anyone who has had to make a claim against DVA knows it can be quite a harrowing experience. When you look at the figures above you can understand why DVA has to be careful when approving claims, the amount of money already outlaid every year is astronomical and unless each claim is carefully scrutinised and justified, that sum could balloon into an unmanageable amount.

That doesn't mean though that claims should take years to be approved nor does it mean that DVA should appear to have a mind-set of making it as difficult as possible for a claimant to get access to his/her justifiable benefits. A critical shortage of staff could be responsible for this and it has reflected badly on DVA's image over the years, but that's not DVA's fault. Look to the Government for the blame [HERE](#).

Because the sums are so huge, there are numerous checks, (some very complicated) a claimant must overcome before his/her claim can be approved which is why he/she should not attempt to submit a claim without first seeking professional advice.

Contrary to belief from some sections of the community, it's not DVA's role or intention to make it as hard as it possibly can for you to submit a claim, it's quite the opposite. DVA staff are just normal people doing a job. They are not out to hurt you or make your life miserable, they like anyone else when it comes to spending tax-payer's money, have to abide by a set of rules. It's like trying to get a loan from a bank, unless all your ducks are in line - you haven't a hope.

With DVA, it's no good even getting to first base unless all your paper-work is current and correct. That's where an Advocate is indispensable.

DVA has a section describing what an Advocate can and will do for you and in all cases, urges you to use one. (See [HERE](#)). Advocates are trained and know what is required and know to prepare and submit your claim. Importantly, they will also tell you whether or not you actually have a claim. There are a lot of arm chair lawyers out there who will tell you that DVA owes you and will urge you to submit a claim. You are urged to ignore these, (well meaning??) people as they can give you incorrect advice which, if submitted, could put a damper on a subsequent claim. Alternatively, when or if your claim is refused as it did not qualify, when your "friend" said it would, you, quite naturally, would blame DVA.

Save yourself a lot of hassle, before you even think of submitting a claim – go see an Advocate.

