

SECRETARY

OPENING STATEMENT

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 DECEMBER 2025

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Responding to the Royal Commission

This week marks one year since the Government's response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

As Minister Keogh said at his National Press Club address yesterday, by the end of the year, 32 recommendations will have been implemented, with a further 89 recommendations in progress or under consideration.

As a Department, DVA continues to take meaningful steps in strengthening how we support the veteran community while responding to the Royal Commission's recommendations.

As the Minister announced yesterday, the Government is providing \$78 million over four years to establish an agency focused on veteran wellbeing within DVA, in response to recommendation 87 of the Royal Commission.

Significant work is underway in DVA to stand up the agency by 1 July next year.

The wellbeing agency is just one example of our renewed emphasis on wellbeing and up-front prevention and treatment, which means that veterans are able to benefit from early intervention and having their conditions treated before they become chronic.

I am pleased to update the committee that we are leveraging AI to enable us to better support veterans and families while at the same time having appropriate governance arrangements in place to support its ethical, safe and secure use.

DVA recently launched an enhanced departmental website tool, which includes an AI-powered search tool, and we have been piloting an AI tool internally to make it faster and easier for our claims staff to find relevant policy content on DVA's Consolidated Library of Information and Knowledge system when they are processing claims. Neither of these tools access claims data or personal records.

Integrity activities

As the Department informed the recent hearings of the Senate inquiry into advocacy services relating to veteran compensation and income support, we are proactively taking steps to ensure veterans and families can access safe, ethical and reliable support.

Over the past 6 months, DVA has put in place a range of measures to deter, investigate and respond to any fraudulent or irregular claiming behaviour. This includes encouraging public tip-offs, updating our guidelines for providers, and carrying out audits of service delivery and payments. Where necessary we refer matters to regulators or law enforcement and stop paying providers who do not meet expected standards.

We're also providing education and guidance to providers, veterans and families, including through a current public information campaign, which encourages the use of online-lodgement or free advocacy support options for making a claim.

Further we are taking all available steps to ensure veterans are impacted as little as possible by compliance actions. This involves working with veterans directly including assistance with finding a new advocate and or facilitating medical appointments where necessary and rescreening for vulnerability as we do when claims are initially lodged.

As outlined by the Minister yesterday, the Government has announced it will provide funding to the new Institute of Veterans' Advocacy to act as the professional association for veteran advocates to ensure more advocates are appropriately trained, qualified and required to comply with ethics and conduct rules.

The Government is also more than doubling funding to the Building Excellence in Support and Training grants program to enable more advocates to deliver services that will be free to veterans and give organisations greater funding certainty.

These safeguards reflect our commitment to ensuring veterans and families receive the support they deserve and we thank the many advocates and service providers who support veterans and families of veterans with professionalism and care.

APS Census and Trust in Australian Public Services Report

DVA's results in the 2025 APS census and Trust in Australian Public Services Report reflect a clear and positive shift across all indices.

This momentum positions us strongly to maintain and accelerate this trajectory into 2026.

Commemorations

As Senators would be aware, veterans and family members of veterans travelled with our DVA delivery support teams to deliver Anzac Day services in Türkiye, France, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea this year.

This was a resounding success and, as a result, we are increasing the number of veterans and veteran family members in the delivery teams next year.

I am pleased to advise that we received more than 850 applications from the veteran community expressing interest in joining these delivery teams.

Thank you Chair. I look forward to your questions.