



Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

30 JULY 2024

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

As the primary union representing employees within the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is committed to providing a strong voice for our members in key public policy and political debates.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to this Senate inquiry into the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 [Provisions]. These changes will have a significant impact on the work of our members in DVA, particularly those working in the Client Benefits Division.

Members are of the view that these changes are likely to make the claims process more efficient internally as well as externally. Currently, APS5 employees decide on claims that fall under up to three pieces of legislation relating to military/defence entitlements. Only a limited number of staff are trained for all three Acts, so the current arrangements create a bottleneck and high demand for those staff members, not to mention a very complicated and slow experience for veterans. As noted in the interim recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans' Suicide*, the tri-Act regime was a key contributing factor to the extensive backlog of veterans' medical and compensation claims.

Members are concerned, however, about the increasing use of auxiliary codes and soft-phone technology, particularly those who previously worked at Services Australia. This technology is used widely in Services Australia and has led to a highly micromanaged environment, leading to increased staff turnover. It is critical for CPSU members that existing and potential psychosocial hazards are addressed adequately when changes are made in the workplace. If the use of soft-phones and auxiliary codes are expected to be used to measure adherence following Departmental changes, claims workers may be subject to low job control and micromanagement.

CPSU submission

Members have received mixed messages about whether there are plans to increase calls with auxiliary codes adherence requirements, some being told categorically there are no plans while others have been told calls will be expanding. They are concerned this technology will be used heavily in DVA once the three Acts are effectively combined under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*, impacting on processing times. Ensuring adherence to auxiliary codes takes 20 to 30 minutes per day and increased call volumes will affect processing capacity as claims processing is complex and cannot be done quickly. Giving staff additional requirements or workloads takes them away from a stream of work they are already behind on.

While changes to legislation will make a difference, it must also be complemented by additional training and recruitment. The additional Average Staffing Levels provided since 2022 have made a difference, helping to clear backlogs but more support is needed. APS5 employees trained to decide on veterans' claims are hard to come by, with an impact on workloads when there is staff turnover. The CPSU recommends that the reforms are matched with an investment in quality training and career pathways for APS3 and APS4 employees and increasing permanent roles in line with the APS Strategic Commissioning Framework and DVA's new demand-driven funding model.

The CPSU is happy to provide further information regarding any of the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

Yours sincerely,

Brooke Muscat
National President, CPSU-PSU Group