

Ensuring Equitable Access to DVA Entitlements—Ending Commercial Advocacy Fees for Veterans

Executive Summary

Veterans are increasingly paying commercial advocates to access statutory entitlements through the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). This practice imposes financial burdens, undermines equity, and erodes trust in public institutions. Veterans' entitlements are legal rights—not services to be monetized. This brief recommends legislative and administrative reforms to protect veterans from unnecessary costs and ensure universal, free access to qualified advocacy.

Problem Statement

- **Unjust Financial Burden:** Commercial advocates charge fees—often a percentage of compensation—reducing the support veterans receive.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Charging for access to statutory entitlements contradicts the principle of universal service-based support.
- **Systemic Risk:** The growth of paid services undermines the role of Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) and public confidence in DVA.

Evidence

- Veterans report paying up to tens of thousands in fees for services that are available free through ESOs.
- Where options exist for a Veteran to elect for compensation through weekly payments, commercial contracts often enforce election of lump sum payments – which may not be in the best interest of the veteran.
- DVA decisions are based on legislation and evidence—commercial advocates cannot expedite or influence outcomes.
- The Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) ensures ESO advocates are qualified and ethical, unlike unregulated commercial providers.

Policy Recommendations

- **Legislate Against Fee-Based Advocacy:** Prohibit commercial entities from charging veterans for assistance with DVA claims.
- **Strengthen ESO Advocacy Capacity:** Increase funding for ESOs and expand ATDP training to meet demand for free, qualified support.
- **Public Education Campaign:** Launch a national initiative to inform veterans of their rights and the availability of free advocacy including how to submit claims themselves.

- **Establish Oversight Mechanisms:** Introduce a regulatory framework to monitor advocacy practices and enforce ethical standards.

Stakeholders

- **Veterans and Families:** Direct beneficiaries of improved access and protection.
- **Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs):** Key partners in delivering ethical, free advocacy.
- **Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA):** Responsible for administering entitlements, ensuring equitable access and educating veterans in how to submit claims for liability and other services.
- **Parliament and Government Agencies:** Legislative and funding authority to enact reforms.

Conclusion

Veterans should never be charged to access what they've earned through service. By eliminating commercial advocacy fees and reinforcing public support systems, Australia can uphold its commitment to those who served—and ensure no veteran is left behind.