

8 October 2025

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

By email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat,

**Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee (the Committee)
Inquiry into Issues relating to advocacy services for veterans accessing compensation and income support**

I refer to the above inquiry, and the public hearing that took place on 26 September 2025.

Both my organisation, Veteran Benefits Australia, and me personally, were named during the public hearing by Mr John Weston, being a representative of RSL Victoria. I write to exercise my right of reply and to provide the Committee with further details about the vital work Veteran Benefits Australia carries out in assisting veterans in Australia.

Veteran Benefits Australia

In 2015, I created 'Veteran Benefits Australia' as a Facebook group and online blog, with the aim of providing veterans with information and assistance relating to entitlements, as well as to assist veterans in connecting with the services that they required.

Veteran Benefits Australia connects veterans with a large range of services, many of which are wholly independent to Veteran Benefits Australia, or any business that I am connected with. The Facebook page serves as a referral hub for the various services veterans require, as well as providing a platform for veterans to provide recommendations directly to other veterans about services that have been valuable and provide feedback about services that are lacking. I have observed that the feedback veterans have provided has led directly to innovation within the veteran healthcare sector, and I am of the view that this innovation likely would not have otherwise occurred.

Vertical integration in care for veterans

In developing a business model that best serves the needs of Australian veterans, we have deliberately developed a group of healthcare businesses that are associated, in order to provide holistic, streamlined, and integrated care. The businesses within the group are structured so each business maintains individual entities, which provides the ability to specialise, build a depth of expertise, and flexibly respond to the needs of clients and the business, all while ensuring clients receive a coordinated system of care. It is our view that this model provides clients with the 'best of both worlds' – where individual entities can provide focused care and quality within their specialities, while the vertical integration provides continuity of care and less fragmentation of care for veterans.

Our longstanding business model aligns with the findings of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, which explicitly emphasised a greater need for stronger coordination across service domains, improved collaboration to streamline the outcomes, and the development of integrated and person-centred care models.

In establishing our model, we have intentionally sought to emulate other vertically-integrated models of healthcare in Australia that deliver positive outcomes for patients successfully. By way of example, we note:

- Ramsay Health Care operates hospitals, day surgery centres, mental health services, and other complementary health services;
- Healius, which combines medical centres, pathology, and imaging services; and
- Sonic Healthcare, which has a network of pathology and radiology businesses across multiple jurisdictions.

These positive examples are also replicated in the aged care and community sectors, primarily evidenced by Bupa and Estia Health.

The various integrated health models set out above demonstrate that this type of structure allows patients to experience depth of expertise while also benefiting from holistic outcomes and efficient and coordinated care.

Claims made by Mr Weston

In his comments at the Public Hearing, Mr Weston made vague and misleading claims relating to my part-ownership of various entities that provide services to veterans. Given these claims were made without any further detail to support the claims, I am particularly concerned about the way in which this information was presented as “predatory”.

Given the details of our business model set out above, the comments by Mr Weston are misleading and damaging. My involvement and ownership of multiple businesses within the veteran healthcare sector has, at all times, been public knowledge and disclosed to those who may wish to obtain services. As part of my transparent approach, I routinely appear in local and national media to discuss my role, Veteran Benefits Australia, and the work of the businesses in our group.

I truly believe in the valuable work that I do as part of Veteran Benefits Australia and within our group. I am concerned that the comments made by Mr Weston may have given the wrong impression to both the Committee, and the general public, and this has the potential to cause significant reputational harm and damage to the work that we do.

Separately, the claims made by Mr Weston were followed by separate statements relating to other companies that may operate in the veteran healthcare sector, including that other companies allegedly pay doctors for referrals, including significant funds paid for medicinal cannabis referrals. While Mr Weston did acknowledge that these allegations were separate to the claims made about Veteran Benefits Australia, and the various companies in our group, the distinction did not appear to be clear to the Committee, or the media that has since covered the Public Hearing.

This detail is of particular concern to me, particularly given that various publications, including The Australian and The Canberra Times, have subsequently published articles referring to the conduct of my companies as ‘predatory’.

Conclusion

As I am sure the Committee understands, veterans have long been an underserved population. It is the aim of Veteran Benefits Australia to reduce the barriers that veterans have historically faced in accessing much-needed services in an efficient and coordinated manner. I am concerned as to the potential impact that the comments made by Mr Weston, on behalf of RSL Victoria, could have on veterans seeking assistance in accessing services.

Separately, I wish to express disappointment that the Chair of the Committee, Senator Sarah Henderson, circulated an article on social media published by The Australian that refers to, and sensationalises, the comments of Mr Weston. I am of the view that it is premature for the Chair of the Committee to be politicising issues while the Inquiry remains ongoing.

I respectfully request that the Committee note the evidence provided in this submission and accurately portray the services of Veteran Benefits Australia in any final report of findings. I confirm that I am available to appear before the Senate to provide further details to the matters addressed in this submission and answer any questions directly.

Respectfully,

Thomas Bailey