

OPENING STATEMENT
SECRETARY LIZ COSSON AM, CSC
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2018–19
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE LEGISLATION
COMMITTEE
5 APRIL 2019
MAIN COMMITTEE ROOM, PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Chair and Members, I would like to begin by tabling my formal response to a request for information from Senator Gallacher and offer the opportunity to provide further details during this hearing.

In summary, my response offers the following key elements:

2019-20 Budget - Veteran Centric Reform

The 2019-20 Veteran Centric Reform has been allocated \$219.3m which is continue the transformation of DVA. This funding will be provided to DVA and DHS to continue to leverage ICT programmes and the broader transformation program. Our PBS reflects \$171.6m in offsets that will be delivered through DVA's efficiencies measures, better procurement and better outcomes for veterans and their families.

As a result of our recent VCR investment over the past two years, the department has become more efficient in the direct delivery of services, and in purchasing services from providers in the health sector to ensure better health outcomes.

We have identified areas where we can adopt better practice by making changes to how DVA operates and delivers services.

More detail on funding arrangements is in **Attachment A**.

Veteran Card and Covenant

Since our last hearing for Additional Estimates, many more businesses have clarified the specifics of their involvement in the Veteran Card, what discounts they propose offering, how this differs from other membership arrangements and when these discounts will be available to veterans.

I was pleased to see that the Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Bill was debated in the House over the last week.

While it seems that this Bill may not pass this Parliament, it was pleasing to see the debate, and the consensus around recognising our veterans and their families.

I know there is some interest in the Veteran Card and that there are businesses that will support veterans who have that card.

As at 4 April 2019, more than 70 businesses have registered with DVA, with 47 making a specific offer to veterans.

More detailed information is in **Attachment B**.

Veteran Payment

I am also pleased to report with the introduction of the Veteran Payment in response to the Joint Inquiry into Jesse Bird's suicide, over 540 veterans and partners have been provided this assistance. A breakdown of how long individuals have been receiving this payment and if any have exceeded the 42-day period after their liability claim for a mental health condition has been determined.

The Veteran Payment commenced on 1 May 2018, and provides vulnerable veterans and eligible partners with interim income support until their liability claim for a mental health condition is determined.

These numbers are in **Attachment C**.

Advertising and information campaigns

I also inform the Committee how much the department spent on advertising and information campaigns in this financial year to date and provide details about this spending, including activities planned for the remainder of 2018-19.

This has been provided in **Attachment D**.

Attachment A – Veteran Centric Reform

When DVA embarked on this transformation journey, we made a commitment to the entire veteran community and their families that we would improve the quality of our services and be more efficient and effective in the way we deliver these services to veterans and their families.

To ensure that we are efficient in the future, we are looking internally at how we can improve the way we do business.

We have now identified areas where we can improve efficiencies by making changes to how DVA operates and delivers services.

These efficiencies are not about reducing services to veterans and their families. These efficiencies are about DVA identifying ways to work smarter and better manage and oversee the quality of the services that are being delivered on our behalf.

We are thinking differently about how we deliver services and where we can partner with external health service providers to improve the quality of services that our veterans and their families receive.

Improving treatment pathways is an area where we have identified the potential for significant savings. By partnering with an external provider we are going to better analyse, review and assure the quality of the services our clients are receiving.

We want to be diligent and well informed about the treatment and care our veterans and their families receive and ensure that we are getting value for money for Australian tax payers when these services are delivered.

We are also starting to see the real benefits that our investment in transformation is delivering. Bringing claims online and tackling our complicated telephone system is delivering savings through improved performance – we are reducing waiting times and the time taken to process claims.

Attachment B – Veteran Card and Covenant

I was pleased to see that the Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Bill was debated in the House over the last week.

While it seems that this Bill may not pass this Parliament, it was pleasing to see the debate, and the consensus around recognising our veterans and their families.

Recognition, of course, is the key element of the program. Providing all Australians the opportunity to recognise our veterans is the most important part of our program.

I know there is some interest in the Veteran Card and the Businesses that will support veterans who have that card.

The primary purpose of the Veteran Card continues to be providing health services to veterans. The use of the Veteran Card to access concessions and business offers will be an extra benefit that card holders can access.

As at 4 April 2019, more than 70 businesses have registered with DVA, with 47 making a specific offer to veterans.

Business interest ranges from large nationally recognised companies to family run businesses in regional areas across Australia.

In the majority of cases, businesses have indicated they will provide a percentage discount off the retail price of their good or services. The benefit to be offered will be at the discretion of the participating business or organisation.

We are very proud that we have received interest in this program from many businesses across the country, from large national businesses in the grocery and financial industries to small family or veteran run businesses. Learning the stories of some of these participating businesses has been one of the highlights of this program.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those Australian businesses who are coming forward and expressing interest in this program and showing their support to our veterans and their families.

Some of these businesses require further negotiation to address issues such as identifying Veteran Card holders through their respective ICT systems.

The DVA website will publish the names of the participating businesses and community organisations as part of the Minister's official launch and will be updated as interest continues to grow.

Attachment C – Veteran Payment

As an outcome of the Joint Inquiry into Jesse Bird's suicide, the implementation of the Veteran Payment has now been offered to over 500 eligible veterans and partners to provide financial support as the department progresses a claim. I offer the breakdown of how long individuals have been receiving this payment and if any have exceeded the 42-day period after their liability claim for a mental health condition has been determined.

The Veteran Payment commenced on 1 May 2018, and provides vulnerable veterans and eligible partners with interim income support until their liability claim for a mental health condition is determined.

As at 15 March 2019, 310 veterans and 89 partners were receiving the payment.

Of those 310 veterans, 34 were receiving it for 50 days or less, 42 for 51–100 days, 70 for 101–150 days, 44 for 151–200 days, 35 for 201–250 days and 85 for more than 250 days.

As at 15 March, the number of veterans who were still receiving the payment after having their claim determined was 155. Of those, 92 continue to receive Veteran Payment after the 42-day period allowing for an uninterrupted transition to another form of income support.

Attachment D – Advertising and information campaigns

I also inform the Committee how much the department spent on advertising and information campaigns in this financial year to date.

The Department's total expenditure on advertising and information campaigns undertaken in the 2018–19 financial year to 28 February 2019 is \$116,248.35 paid to Universal McCann with a further \$174,716.54 paid this financial year to DentsuX Australia Pty Limited for work completed in the previous financial year.

The list of the campaigns to date, how much each of them cost and an itemised list of their AusTender Contract Notice numbers.

Advertising and information campaigns from 1 July 2018 to 28 February 2019
(all figures GST excl.)

AusTender Contract Notice number	Description	Value
CND004766	Veterans' Employment Program advertising	\$52,577.97
CND004562	Advocacy Scoping Study consultations	\$12,497.79
CND004586	Veterans Review Board notices	\$12,518.64
CND004593	Scoping Study consultations notices	\$12,110.97
CND004903	Graduate Program advertising	\$11,660.00

Note, contracts of under \$10,000 are not required to be reported on AusTender.

Details of any advertising and information campaigns planned for the remainder of 2018-19.

Planning is under way to develop two small campaigns on the Coordinated Veterans' Care Mental Health Pilot and GP Health Assessment. While the Mental Health Pilot is almost finalised and is due to go live in the next two weeks, the timings and content of the GP Health Assessment campaign are still being finalised.

Coordinated Veterans' Care mental health pilot

This campaign has a budget of \$2,000 and is going through final approvals within the department before being launched. It is expected the campaign will run for about four weeks, and start in the next fortnight. The campaign

promotes a new mobile digital coaching application and targets veterans and GPs with the aim of getting veterans to sign up for the trial.

The GP Health Assessment

The campaign has a budget of \$10,000, and is also going through internal approvals at the department. This campaign is currently planned to go live at the end of April, and run for about four weeks, and encourages veterans transitioning out of the Australian Defence Force to book in with their GP for a health assessment.