



Australian Government

Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE & STAKEHOLDER MEETING
23 September 2021 1:00pm – 2:30pm

ATTENDEES	
Members	Representing
Professor Jane Burns	Chair
Dr Andrew Khoo	Psychiatrists
Dr Brad Murphy	General Practitioners
Mrs Anne Pahl	Peacekeepers
Benjamin Flink	Reservists
Ms Talissa Papamau	Contemporary Veterans
Mr Adrian Sutter	Contemporary Veterans
Ex-Officio	
WO Grant McFarlane	RSM-A
WOFF Jason Pyke	On behalf of Warrant Officer RAAF
WO-N Deb Butterworth	Warrant Officer Navy
RADM Sarah Sharkey	Joint Health Command
Mr Don Spinks AM	Repatriation Commissioner
Mr Stuart Smith	Defence Liaison Commissioner
Ms Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate
A/Prof Andrea Phelps	Phoenix Australia
Secretariat	
Miss Laura Thompson	NAC Secretariat
Invited Guests	
Ms Leanne Cameron	First Assistant Secretary – Mental Health & Wellbeing Services
Ms Jennifer Veitch	Assistant National Manager – National Operations
Ms Helen Braun	Assistant National Manager – Client Services
Apologies	
Prof David Forbes	Director, Phoenix Australia
Mr Paul Way	Director General, DCO
WOFF-AF Fiona Grasby	Warrant Officer RAAF

Items 1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Chair welcomed the Committee and invited guests.

The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of Country through Australia and recognised their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. Respects were paid to their Elders past, present and emerging. The Chair also acknowledged the service of all current and former Australian Defence Force members and their families. In particular, Australia's Vietnam veterans – Open Arms is their legacy. They have ensured that future generations of serving men and women will have access to specialised mental health and wellbeing support.

Apologies were accepted from Gina Craig, currently acting as Director General DCO. A/Prof Andrea Phelps was in attendance on behalf of Prof David Forbes, Phoenix Australia and WOFF Jason Pyke on behalf of WOFF-AF Fiona Grasby, RAAF. Conflicts of Interests were declared via the Conflict of Interest form.

Item 2: Outstanding matters from previous meeting

Led by: Chair

The previous meeting minutes from April 2021 were provided to Committee members. All members present at the April 2021 meeting provided their endorsement of the minutes.

The Chair advised that nominations for the vacant positions on the NAC were received from the Partners of Veterans Association (PVA), the Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) and Legacy Australia's Development Opportunities Section. The Australian War Widows Inc. was also approached but did not provide a nomination. A Ministerial brief is awaiting consideration.

Appointments expiring in July 2021 have been extended to the end of the year in light of the impact COVID-19 has had on consultations.

The Chair noted the National Manager Dr Stephanie Hodson's secondment to the Department of Health supporting the COVID-19 response. The Chair congratulated Steph and recognised the significant role she has played as the National Manager of Open Arms. During Steph's time as National Manager, the service has experienced huge growth and innovation, including the increased trust in and awareness of the service in the veteran community.

Item 3: Update on structural changes and next steps

Presenter: Leanne Cameron, First Assistant Secretary Mental Health & Wellbeing Services Division

Ms Cameron provided the NAC with an update on the restructure of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Services Division to bring together Open Arms, Coordinated Client Support and the DVA Communications Team. Additionally, a new branch has been created within the division, the Mental and Social Health Programs (M&SHP) branch. This new branch provides an additional Assistant Secretary position, reducing the risk associated with the large span of control previously managed by the Open Arms National Manager.

Following Dr Hodson's secondment to the Department of Health, both Senior Executive Staff (SES) Band 1 positions are currently vacant (Assistant Secretary M&SHP branch and National Manager Open Arms). An expression of interest process is currently underway pending the outcome of recruitment for filling the roles permanently.

All branches within the division have been restructured to:

- maintain the stand alone, separate counselling service, Open Arms;
- ensure the ongoing case management focus of the Client Coordinated Support branch; and
- provide comprehensive program support for mental health and wellbeing service delivery through the new M&SHP branch including the quality, policy and innovations of Open Arms.

Ms Cameron advised the Committee of a functional review underway within the division. A Business Operating model will also be developed outlining what we look like now vs. what we would like to look like.

ACTION: Include presentation and discussion of divisional Business Operating Model on future agenda.

The Committee requested an update on the outcomes of the Wellbeing and Support Program (WASP) pilot within DVA. Ms Cameron advised the pilot was a success and WASP has been embedded into business as usual.

ACTION: Circulate evaluation report for the Wellbeing and Support Program pilot.

Item 4: Open Arms National Manager Update

Presenters: Helen Braun, Assistant National Manager Open Arms & Jennifer Veitch, Assistant National Manager M&SHP

Ms Braun provided updates from around the regions with the following highlights:

- staff wellbeing is currently the number one priority for Open Arms, noting the fatigue currently experienced across all regions
- Western Australia is now a stand-alone region with a local leadership team
 - o the region's staffing profile has grown by 17 people, including five additional peers
 - o the peers in the region are working with the Special Forces community to provide additional support
- plans underway to expand in Katherine, Northern Territory
- options being considered to bolster local leadership in South Australia, as shared Director located in Darwin currently unable to travel with COVID restrictions
- engagement with wellbeing centre and the Andrew Russell Veteran Living (ARVL) pilot in South Australia
- the state most impacted by the pandemic, Victoria, has also been the most willing to take up telehealth
 - o Victorian Director has many initiatives to keep the team connected with one another while dispersed for such a long period of time, including a choir group, dad jokes feed, shared playlists and ensuring clinical supervision needs are constantly re-assessed and met
- engagement with the new wellbeing centre to be established in Tasmania, as announced in the budget
- a new Director has commenced in Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
 - o the ACT has the highest waiting times, and clients in this region have been least willing to take up telehealth options
- the Greater New South Wales region are actively supporting the Special Forces community including
 - o supporting local high profile defamation trial
 - o partnering with wandering warriors to co-locate two Peer Workers
- the South Queensland region are also partnering with wandering warriors to co-locate two Peer Workers
- the North Queensland region is working to upskill clinicians in dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), due to the lack of local providers with DBT skills the region will now be able to provide in centre. This will be evaluated to determine the success of this initiative.

Ms Veitch provided an update on National Operations with the following highlights:

- representatives from the Community and Peer Program had an opportunity to meet with Ms Christine Morgan, the Prime Minister's Suicide Prevention Adviser and CEO of the National Mental Health Commission to provide more information on the Program
- improvement work underway within Client Safety and Quality

- looking at how to streamline and strengthen the ways we review client cases to improve quality over time
- capturing and responding to client complaints, routine file audits, client outcomes and adverse outcomes
- yielding themes to determine where to refocus resources
- updates in Client Risk Management
 - successful implementation of the SafeSide framework in centre
 - soon to be rolled out to the Outreach Program Counsellor network.

Item 5: Information Brief: Revised Consent Forms

Led by: Jennifer Veitch, Assistant National Manager

The NAC were provided with an information brief containing seven attachments with revised consent forms for Open Arms. Each document had tracked changes included to provide members with visibility of the changes made to each form.

It was noted that the amendment of consent forms was initially discussed with the NAC in 2017, following the *Joint Inquiry into the facts surrounding the management of Mr Jesse Bird's case* which included recommendation to; “enhance reporting and risk factor escalation between VVCS and DVA through an offering to clients that includes an ‘opt-out’ model of information sharing, so that all support services are integrated for clients with diagnosed mental health issues” (recommendation 4).

Subsequently, Professor Robin Creyke conducted an independent review of the implementation of recommendations from the Jesse Bird Joint Inquiry. The 2019 review report recommended further amendments to the consent forms to remove restrictions on communication to avoid potential self-harm.

Ms Veitch informed the Committee of the key amendments including;

- development of an ‘opt-out’ system - the default consent is now agreement for Open Arms to share information with DVA, with the option for clients to decline; and
- amendment to make the threshold surrounding risk clearer – the forms are now more explicit as to whether Open Arms can share information with DVA or not, with an explanation on sharing information in ‘at-risk’ situations.

The Committee members noted the new consent forms and acknowledged the significant amount of work completed to improve these documents. The Committee endorsed the implementation of new forms.

ACTION: Progress the implementation of endorsed consent forms.

Meeting Closed at: 2:30 pm