



Australian Government

Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE & STAKEHOLDER MEETING

9 October 2020 10:00am – 12:00pm

ATTENDEES	
Members	Representing
Professor Jane Burns	Chair
Ms Anne Pahl	Peacekeepers
Major Benjamin Flink	Reservists
Dr Brad Murphy	General Practitioners
Mr Ken Foster	Vietnam Veterans
Mr Adrian Sutter	Contemporary Veterans
Ex-Officio	
Mr Don Spinks AM	Repatriation Commissioner
Dr Stephanie Hodson CSC	National Manager, Open Arms
Professor David Forbes	Director, Phoenix Australia
Mr Paul Way	Director General, DCO
WOFF Jason Pyke	On behalf of WOFF-AF Fiona Grasby
WO-N Deb Butterworth	Warrant Officer Navy
BRIG Craig Schramm	On behalf of RADM Sarah Sharkey
Invited Guests	
Dr Anna Colwell	Deputy National Manager, Open Arms
Mr Robert Swanwick	Director Peers, Engagement & Communications, Open Arms
Ms Anna Gressier	Assistant Director Communications, Open Arms
Apologies	
Dr Andrew Khoo	Psychiatrists
WO Grant McFarlane	RSM-A
Ms Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate, DVA
MAJGEN Stuart Smith	Commissioner for Defence Engagement, DVA
RADM Sarah Sharkey	Surgeon General ADF, JHC
WOFF-AF Fiona Grasby	Warrant Officer RAAF
Dr Jenny Firman	Chief Health Officer, DVA
Ms Talissa Papamau	Contemporary Veterans
Secretariat	
Ms Laura Thompson	Open Arms
Ms Kate Sowerby	Open Arms

Items 1: Welcome, Acknowledgements and Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the virtual National Advisory Committee (NAC) meeting.

The Chair advised the Committee that the new process proposed to the Minister for appointment vacancies was approved. The Committee's endorsement will be sought on a draft Expression of Interest (EOI) and revised Terms of Reference out of session.

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- The Committee raised concerns that advertising the EOI via social media will be broad. It was recommended for the EOI to be circulated through the five major DVA forums including:
 - Ex-Service Organisation Round Table;
 - Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum;
 - National Aged Care and Community Care Forum;
 - Council for Women and Families Unity by Defence Service; and
 - Female Veterans and Veterans' Families Policy Forum.

The Committee were advised that the Minister had also approved two additional ex-officio positions. DVA Veteran Family Advocate, Ms Gwen Cherne and DVA Defence Liaison Commissioner, MAJ GEN Stuart Smith will be invited to attend future NAC meetings.

ACTION: Circulate revised Terms of Reference and draft EOI out of session for Committee endorsement.

Item 2: Open Arms National Manager Post Budget Update

Presenter: Dr Stephanie Hodson, National Manager Open Arms

Trends

Demand: Open Arms has experienced a 24% increase in demand from the previous financial year. Dr Hodson reported that Open Arms saw an increase in clients and sessions each year from December 2019, peaking in July 2020. In the last two months this has levelled off but remains consistently high.

Call Volume: Total calls received has remained consistent with a steady increase over the last 12 months. December 2019 and April 2020 saw a decrease in total calls received. There was a peak in total calls received in February 2020.

Complex Needs & Peer Support: Aligning with the peak in counselling clients in July 2020, this month also saw the highest number of complex needs services. Since the expansion of the Peer Program there has been a steady increase in peer support services.

ACTION: Open Arms to invite BRIG Wade Stothart to present on the Joint Transition Authority.

2020/21FY Budget

Dr Hodson provided an overview of the 2020/21 budget outcomes for the Department including:

- \$101.7m to support the mental health of veterans and their families;
- \$64.1m for additional resourcing within the Department;
- \$25.9m for Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Veterans rent assistance;
- \$6.0m to broaden the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program; and
- \$1.1m for the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII.

The funding allocated to mental health was broken into three measures, \$94.3m to increase the fees paid by DVA to mental health, social work and community nursing providers, \$2.4m to expand eligibility of the Coordinated Veterans' Care program, and \$5.0m to expand Open Arms.

The expansion of Open Arms will consist of three components.

- Community and Peer Program – Open Arms will be recruiting two additional Peer Teams in locations of high demand. Nowra, NSW has been identified to provide peer support coverage to the upcoming Veteran Wellbeing Centre, and Maryborough, QLD to increase capacity and reach to South Queensland, a region with one of the highest numbers of current complex cases.

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- Web Forums – to increase reach and ability to support veterans and their families who are geographically or socially isolated, Open Arms will be creating web forums. The web forums will utilise existing Peer Teams and target specific groups of veterans and families such as those bereaved by suicide, and those living with chronic trauma symptoms.
- Outcomes Monitoring Framework – to address a recommendation from the Productivity Commission, Open Arms will be developing an Outcomes Monitoring Framework to ensure high quality service delivery and to determine which components of the service provide the most effective support to veterans and their families.

ACTION: Provide an update to the NAC on what the increase in fees paid by DVA means for Open Arms' Outreach Program Counsellor (OPC) network.

ACTION: Add workshop of Web Forums to next meeting agenda.

Item 3: COVID-19 Updates

Discussion: All Members

Promotion of reconnection: the Committee reiterated the importance to promote physical connections post COVID-19, as discussed at the last meeting. Mrs Anne Pahl advised the Victorian RSL are working with Open Arms on ways to reconnect veterans in social environments when possible. Mr Adrian Sutter updated the Committee on his organisation, Swiss8's push to connect the veteran community for Remembrance Day.

Online support: the value of virtual support was noted as being a positive take-away from the crisis. Evaluation of the effectiveness of online support is underway, conducted by the RSL.

Advocacy workload: the Committee reported an increase in the case load for veteran advocates. As individuals have had more spare time there had been a corresponding increase in the number of claims submitted. Dr Brad Murphy requested the committee to consider how to educate GPs on DVA and the role of advocates.

Public health measures: it was noted that the public health measures are having a significant increase on mental health however, the shared experience is assisting individuals to feel more understood and connected.

ACTION: Add discussion on post-inpatient continuity of care to next meeting agenda.

Item 4: Open Arms Communications Strategy Presentation

Presenter: Ms Anna Gressier, Assistant Director Communications, Open Arms

Ms Anna Gressier provided an overview of the Open Arms Communications team and what they do. The three priorities for Open Arms in terms of Communications were advised:

1. Continue to build positive awareness of Open Arms by actively promoting support and services offered, specifically promotion of the Community & Peer Program and of Group Programs.
2. Promotion of Open Arms as an employer of choice in the mental health sector.
3. Strengthen engagement with internal and external stakeholders.

Open Arms has four key deliverables in the Communications space including:

- awareness raising activities – NRL partnership, Peer Instagram Account, RUOK partnership, VSA/Parkrun VHW partnership and VSA educational partnership;

- digital assets – migration of High Res content and tools, decommission of High Res and The Right Mix websites, updates to current suite of mobile apps, development of safety planning app, and expansion of alcohol and drug content;
- employer of choice promotion; and
- stakeholder engagement.

Ms Gressier provided members with a briefing on the Open Arms Square Away creative concept and campaign. Open Arms' key achievements were also showcased.

ACTION: Open Arms to circulate Social Media Pack for members to share with their networks.

Item 5: Open Arms Communications Strategy Discussion

Discussion: All members

The Committee provided positive feedback on the development of Open Arms' communications following the rebrand of the service and noted the value of consolidating the various resources (At-Ease, High Res & The Right Mix) and promoting a single brand.

Meeting Closed at: 12:00 pm

Open Action Items after NAC Meeting 2020/3

Action Item	Description
2020-03	Open Arms to circulate revised NAC Terms of Reference and draft EOI out of session for Committee endorsement.
2020-04	Open Arms to invite BRIG Wade Stothart to present on the Joint Transition Authority.
2020-05	Open Arms to provide an update to the NAC on what the increase in fees paid by DVA means for Open Arms' Outreach Program Counsellor (OPC) network.
2020-06	Add workshop Web Forums to next meeting agenda.
2020-07	Add discussion on post-inpatient continuity of care to next meeting agenda.
2020-08	Open Arms to circulate Social Media Pack to NAC members.