

Minutes – Day One

Agenda Item 1: Chair’s Welcome Address

Acknowledgement of country offered by Brook Shearer.

Chair opened the meeting and welcomed existing and new members and guests:

- Annabelle Wilson – the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner
- Dr Steph Davis – Chief Health Officer DVA
- Amanda Hamer – Assistant Secretary Business Operations Open Arms
- Fiona Jarrett – A/g Assistant Secretary Clinical Operations Open Arms
- Ali McLaren – Deputy Secretary Veterans, Families & Stakeholders Experience

Chair noted apologies from Brig Caitlin Langford and Brad Murphy.

Chair asked for members to declare any conflicts of interest – Nil raised.

Chair advised that BRIG Caitlin Langford has resigned her position in the NAC and acknowledged her contributions to the committee. Commodore Mark Park will take over as the Director General Mental Health and Wellbeing Branch and noted that Commodore Park was unable to attend the meeting.

Chair provided an update on NAC membership tenure and will continue to provide updates as needed.

Chair asked the Committee to endorse the previous meeting minutes (August 2025).

Chair and Deputy Chair ratified the minutes.

Action Items from previous meeting

Action Item No.	Meeting Action Item	Secretariat Action	Status
2025 – 07	Provide members the DVA organisational structure Deputy Secretary VFSEG via Secretariat	Hard copy provided to members during the November meeting.	COMPLETED
2025 – 08	Letter to be written to Minister to provide NAC member opinion regarding commission	Included in 2025-10 action.	COMPLETED
2025 – 10	Chair to author letter to be sent to the Minister after each meeting		COMPLETED

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2025 – 10.1	Circulate Chair’s letter and Minister’s response to Members	NAC Secretariat

Agenda Item 2: Deputy Secretary VFSE: Opening Address

The NAC Chair welcomed the Deputy Secretary McLaren to the meeting and invited her to provide an opening address.

Deputy Secretary McLaren updated the members on the following items:

- Open Arms was successful in maintaining accreditation against the National Mental Health Standards. She acknowledged the work undertaken by Open Arms to achieve this.
- The preparatory review of Open Arms (for Recommendation 75) undertaken by Lisa Carmody is in the final stages with the report expected to be presented by the end of the year. Deputy Secretary McLaren will present report recommendations to the Committee at the next meeting.
- Veteran Employment Awards: recognition of programs supporting veteran employment, with special mention of Wilson Security and the NSW Government who provides a guide to assist ADF Members to translate rank/skills for public sector employment.
- Work is commencing on the Open Arms website, and the NAC Members will be asked to participate in user testing.
- Work is also commencing on the Outreach Program Counsellor Panel refresh, Open Arms new case management system (to replace VERA) and embedding a refreshed Model of Care (focusing on what is working well and what we can do better).
- 2026 is going to be a big year from a commemorative perspective with the 75th Anniversary of National Servicemen (Nashos) and the 25th Anniversary of the Middle East operations. With Open Arms coming into the VFSE group, there has been a focus on Veteran and Families wellbeing and the possibility of having Open Arms clinicians in attendance at commemorative events to provide this support.

Members raised the following items with Deputy Secretary McLaren.

- Veterans Employment Awards
- Incapacity pensions and payments and the impact on veterans and families. How to balance supporting veterans in transition and rehabilitation whilst also providing support for them to reenter the workforce, find purpose outside of Military.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2025 – 11	Invite Luke Brown and Andrew Keford to next meeting to undertake a workshop on incapacity pensions/claims and impact to Veterans and Families.	NAC Secretariat

Agenda Item 3: First Assistant Secretary Update

The NAC Chair invited First Assistant Secretary Leonie Nowland to provide an update.

First Assistant Secretary Nowland updated members on the following items:

- Open Arms Accreditation
- Service design project has commenced with Dr Andrew Khoo engaged as the lead consultant. The project uses epidemiology data and maps outcomes against community data – this enables us to identify gaps in services, where veterans and families are located. Updates will be provided to the Committee as the project progresses.
- Learning and Development Modules for GPs and Allied Health Professionals: working in collaboration with the Chief Health Officer to develop online modules focused on mental health topics to support working with the veteran community. Estimated launch date is May/June 2026.
- There is a focus on provision of services to children and families – this is an identified challenge.

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- Open Arms is looking at pathways to care for cohorts under the Model of Care – including older veterans and how to manage loneliness and transitioning to aged care and military sexual trauma and working with Veterans’ Affairs Canada to develop joint treatment approach.
- The Pathways to Mental Health Project is being expanded to other states and territories. The project focuses on referral and treatment pathways for veterans and families across community, state/territory based mental health organisations.
- Expansion of the Assisted Outreach program (ARVL) to Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne.
- Development of First Responders Program to provide awareness and training to police on the ground who encounter veterans and how to refer into OA. Pilot program will be rolled out in ACT with the Australian Federal Police.

Members Response:

- Thank you to Open Arms for focusing on services to children and families. This has been a longstanding issue.
- Deputy Chair advised Open Arms FAS of a new RSL run program in WA that focuses on veteran homelessness (shelter and community farm outside of Perth region).

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2025 – 12	Provide AIHW Children’s Study link to all members	Secretariat
2025 – 13	Deputy Chair to introduce Open Arms FAS to RSL WA President	Deputy Chair

Agenda Item 4: Chief Health Officer

The Chair invited the Chief Health Officer Dr Steph Davis to provide an update.

CHO Dr Davis provided members a brief personal background and provided updates on the following:

- CHO Office are focused on using data to better inform policies and services
- There have been significant improvements to clinical practices and a refreshed clinical governance structure since 2013. There is a high approval rate overall which is supported by improved workflows for clinical decision making.
- MDMA-assisted therapy applications, clinical requirements and safety considerations. DVA is ensuring there are guidelines and principles for the delivery of this therapy that aligns to TGA – most important is that the DVA framework is focused on client safety

Agenda Item 5: Clinical Operations Update

The Chair invited A/g Assistant Secretary Fiona Jarrett to provide an update.

- Service delivery statistics: 16% of clients are current serving | 32% of clients are ex-serving | 44% of clients are family members
- Most common presenting concerns: Anxiety | Relationships | Depression | Family relationships
- Client Assist take up to 9000 calls per month with the current call wait-time 51 seconds and the call back for intake wait time of approximately 2-3 weeks
- Focus on refreshing the Regional Advisory Forum model to ensure feedback, actions and recommendations from these regional based meetings have a consistent governance and reporting structure. Future state will include a summary of RAFs being provided to NAC for consideration and escalation.

Refer to **Attachment A:** Open Arms NAC Presentation – Section Clinical Operations

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025 – 14	Table summary of RAF meetings to NAC each meeting (for review and discussion of recommendations)	Secretariat

Agenda Item 6: Wellbeing Agency Update

The Chair welcomed Deputy President Mark Brewer to the meeting and invited him to provide an update.

- Mr Brewer provided an overview of Royal Commission recommendations 80, 81, 86 and 87.
- The agency will focus on navigation, case coordination and referrals – the delivery of clinical treatment will remain with Open Arms.
- The mapping of ESOs is not within scope of the agency.
- The initial focus of support will target the 1200 at-risk ADF transitioning members and families, with the Agency scaling up over time. The Veterans and Wellbeing Hubs will be utilised by the Agency to provide this support of community linkages and referrals.
- The agency will be rolled out in July 2026.

Refer to **Attachment B**: Wellbeing Agency Update Presentation.

The Chair requested ongoing updates in the lead up to and implementation of the Agency.

Agenda Item 7: Clinical Governance & Programs

The Chair invited Senior Director Brook Shearer to provide an update.

Refer to **Attachment C** – Clinical Governance & Programs PowerPoint

Senior Director Brook Shearer provided an update on the following:

- Accreditation: Thank you to Committee Members for involvement in the Accreditation process/interviews. OA met all standards in Accreditation, noting that 4 remain outside the scope of OA service delivery. There are approximately 40 improvement recommendations that OA will address over the three-year cycle.
- Consumer & Carer Engagement: OA has drafted a consumer and carer engagement strategy, currently going through approval process.
- Some quick wins in the Diversity and Inclusion space include LGBTIQ+ training for all staff, seeking rainbow accreditation for our centres, ensuring sites have flags, plaques and stickers that mean something.
- Quality Assurance and Suicide Intervention: engagement of Prof Nicholas Proctor to review policies and procedures assessing risk and training our staff in principle-based approach of compassion.
- Clinical Information Management: to date 117 FOIs have been processed and 799 ROIs.
- Digital Mental Health: approximately 1000 telehealth appointments delivered per month. Open Arms is trialling new innovative digital services such as online anonymous forums, online mindfulness programs and online suicidality workshops. The new CMS will support OA in the provision of digital and online services.

Member questions and responses

- What is Open Arms' position on the use of AI in clinical service delivery?
 - Open Arms operates under the Department Veterans' Affairs and needs to align to the Commonwealth Government position. Therefore, Open Arms is unable to use AI to facilitate and support clinical service delivery.
 - Open Arms is aware that OPCs and external providers in private practice have access to AI tools and that this position may be frustrating at the operational level. It was suggested that clear communications be provided to OPCs and Staff to ensure compliance with Government position.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Assigned to</i>
2025 – 14	The Chair requested clinical information and records be placed on the next agenda. Moving forward Critical incidents data and thematic analysis be presented to Members at each meeting.	Secretariat
2025 – 15	Communications regarding the use of AI be provided to OPCs and OA staff.	Senior Director Clinical Governance & Programs

Agenda Item 8: DVA Suicide Prevention Strategy

The Chair welcomed Steph Foster to the meeting.

Steph Foster spoke to a PowerPoint presentation updating the members on DVA’s Suicide Prevention framework which aligns to the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. The project commenced in August 2023 and has now been launched by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs.

Refer to **Attachment D:** NAC Suicide Prevention PowerPoint.

The Chair thanked Steph for the presentation and discussion.

Day One Meeting Closed 4:45pm

Minutes – Day Two

Agenda Item 1: Member Discussion

The Chair welcomed members to Day 2 and a recap was provided on Day 1 agenda items.

The Chair welcomed **Secretary Alison Frame** to the meeting and led the Committee in a discussion on the following:

- Incapacity payments and pensions: flexibility in arrangements and potential for reform.
- DVA Rehabilitation Providers
- Crisis payment process and eligibility
 - ACTION: Secretary Frame asked Veteran Family Advocate Annabelle Wilson to investigate this matter
- The position of DVA, noting potential cuts to public service
- Paid advocates and financial impact to DVA clients who use them
 - A Member acknowledged the success of the WA model for advocacy with the claim’s lodgement advisor and the advocate in the same room working together for the best client outcome.
 - Secretary Frame acknowledged this was developed and implemented by Max Ball and that the model may need to be scaled up across the country.
- Client access to financial advice and whether there is scope to make this a mandatory requirements for clients receiving lump sums and ongoing payments.

The Chair thanked Secretary Frame for attending the meeting.

Agenda Item 2: Member Submission – Epigenetics and the genetic transfer of PTSD and other conditions

The Chair invited Mr Max Ball to introduce his submission.

Refer to **Attachment E:** NAC Submission Mr Max Ball Epigenetics

The Chair provided an explanation of the complexity of epigenetics and advised that current evidence does not show definitive biological trauma transmission.

Agenda Item 3: Business Operations Update

The Chair invited Assistant Secretary Amanda Harmer to provide an update.

- Open Arms is implementing a refreshed approach to managing governance, compliance and quality improvement within the division.
- Work on the new CMS is underway with significant input from representatives across the Division. Implementation is scheduled for the end of March 2026
- Overall Open Arms has a solid operational governance structure in place.

The Chair requested updates to be provided in 2026 on these activities.

Agenda Item 4: Member Submission – Medicinal Cannabis

The Chair invited Mr Max Ball to introduce his submission.

Refer to **Attachment F**: NAC Submission Mr Max Ball Medicinal Cannabis

Discussion included significant concern regarding volume, cost and clinical safety of unregulated medicinal cannabis markets.

The Committee discussed the need for:

- Clear public communication
- Consistent advice for veterans and families
- Education for OA and DVA providers
- A review of the policy settings

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025 – 16	Communications for Outreach Providers and Staff to go out as a priority	Senior Director Clinical Governance & Programs
2025 – 17	Member Richard Magtengaard to provide the screening question to Senior Director Governance & Programs for review and incorporation into clinical practice.	Secretariat to coordinate

Agenda Item 5: Special Envoy Update

The Chair advised that Special Envoy Luke Gosling was unable to attend the meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Meeting Close

The Chair:

- Thanked all members and invited guests for their contribution and robust discussions during the meeting.
- Wished everyone a merry Christmas and thanked all for being engaged, enthusiastic and passionate working group throughout the year.
- Thanked Open Arms for the commitment to delivering services to veterans and families.

Meeting Closed 12:20pm

ATTENDANCE

Members	
Dr Andrew Khoo	Chair - Psychiatrist
Ms Karen Bird	Deputy Chair - Lived Experience Family Member
Dr Richard Magtengaard (virtual)	Psychiatrist
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Ms Lidia Hall	Lived Experience Family Member
Ms Jane Pool	Social Worker
Mr Dave Farrell	Contemporary Veteran
Ms Megan Fry	Psychologist
Ex-Officio Members	
Ms Leonie Nowland	First Assistant Secretary, Open Arms
Dr Jon Lane	A/g Chief Psychiatrist, Department of Veterans' Affairs
Ms Annabelle Wilson	Veteran Family Advocate
Ms Libby Cremen	Director General Defence Members and Families Support
Invited Guests	
Ms Alison Frame (Day 2, session 1)	Secretary – Department Veterans' Affairs
Mr Luke Gosling (Sent apologies)	Special Envoy for Defence, Veterans' Affairs and Northern Australia
Ms Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary – Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience
Dr Steph Davis	Chief Health Officer – Department of Veterans' Affairs
Ms Fiona Jarrett	A/g Assistant Secretary Clinical Operations – Open Arms
Ms Brook Shearer	Senior Director Clinical Governance – Open Arms
Ms Amanda Harmer	Assistant Secretary Business Operations – Open Arms
Mr Mark Brewer (Day 1, session 6)	Deputy President – Department of Veterans' Affairs
Ms Steph Foster (Day 1 session 9)	Executive Director Suicide Prevention – Department Veterans' Affairs
Apologies	
Dr Brad Murphy	General Practitioner
BRIG Caitlin Langford	Director General Mental Health and Wellbeing, Defence People Group
Mr Michael Burvill	Assistant Secretary Clinical Operations
Secretariat + Operational Support	
Ms Patrice Ruddick	Executive Officer – Open Arms
Ms Megan Bennett	FAS Executive Assistant – Open Arms