

***Minister for Veterans' Affairs National Advisory Committee (NAC)
on the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS)***

29 - 30 October 2015, VVCS Sydney Centre

Participants:

Chair	Associate Professor Jane Burns	
Members	Mrs Mel Pyrah - representing partners and families	Mr Paul Copeland OAM JP - representing peacekeeper and peacemakers
	Dr Andrew Khoo – representing psychiatrists	Ms Leanne Galayini - representing sons and daughters
	Mrs Heike Dunn CSM – representing contemporary veterans	Dr Mike Seah – representing General Practitioners
	Mr Brenton Russell DSM - representing contemporary veterans	Dr David Cockram – representing Vietnam veterans
Ex-officio	MAJGEN Mark Kelly, AO, DSC – Repatriation Commissioner	Dr Andrea Phelps – Phoenix Australia – (formally the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health)
	WO Kellie Brett, ADF representative	Dr Loretta Poerio A/g National Manager, VVCS
	Mr Paul Way, Director General , Defence Communities Organisation	
Secretariat	Kylie Robinson, VVCS	

1. Welcome and Apologies

Assoc. Prof. Burns opened the meeting and acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was being held, paying respects to their elders past and present. The Chair acknowledged the Vietnam veterans for the role they played in the establishment of VVCS and their ongoing support and advocacy for the service.

The Chair asked that any conflicts of interest against agenda items be declared. None were declared.

Apologies were received from:

Professor David Forbes – Phoenix Australia;
WO1 Donald Spinks, OAM; and
Mr Wayne Penniall

2. Minutes from the Previous Meeting

2.1 The minutes were endorsed as tabled.

2.2 Actions Arising

Action	Who	Outcome
1. Continued engagement with Mates4Mates and Soldier On	MAJGEN Kelly	Closed - MAJGEN Kelly advised the Committee that he meets regularly with Mr John Bale, CEO, Soldier On and Mr

Action	Who	Outcome
management teams.		Simon Sauer, CEO Mates4Mates to discuss matters of mutual relevance.
2. A conflict of Interest Register is to be set-up by the Secretariat. Any conflicts arising are to be emailed to the Chair for input into the register.	NAC Secretariat	Closed - The NAC endorsed the Conflict of Interest Register and advised the Chair as needed.
3. The NAC seek an update on the activities VVCS is undertaking to ensure GPs are cognisant of the VVCS service offering	Dr Poerio	Agenda item 2.2.2. Closed - The NAC noted the response.
4. Research and Development to be included as a standing agenda item for all future agendas.	NAC Secretariat	Agenda Item 4.2. Closed - The NAC noted that this will become a part of the Chair's report.
5. 2016 Proposed Meeting Dates	NAC Secretariat	Closed - The NAC endorsed the following meeting dates: 18 & 19 February - Brisbane 3 & 4 August – Darwin 13 & 14 October - Perth

3. Correspondence

Inwards	
	Ministerial Update on July 2015 Meeting Outcomes
Outwards	
	3.1 Response endorsed to feedback provided by a client.
	3.2 Response endorsed to feedback provided by a contacted provider.

Action Item

The NAC approved the Secretariat actioning a holding response to future inwards correspondence, detailing to manage expectations in relation to a response.

4. Chairs Report

Assoc. Prof. Burns commenced her report by recapping the major learnings from the client and stakeholder consultations held the previous day (refer Attachment A). Acknowledging the solid reputation of the Sydney VVCS team in supporting and responding to the needs of the local veteran and ex-service community. It was noted that the operational framework that VVCS has put in place, including updated Clinical Practice and Governance policies have created an empowered working environment that allows centre staff to focus on client needs. The Chair noted the positive feedback received from outreach providers and staff in relation to the efficiency of the VERA IT system, noting that the national scope of the VERA system had improved organisational responsiveness to its geographically mobile client base. The

Chair congratulated Dr Poerio and her team, for their continued efforts to enhance service delivery.

The Chair then re-capped the key areas discussed with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs the previous day and led a discussion on areas where the NAC can add value to the Minister's strategic vision for veteran mental health care and the role VVCS plays in this service continuum. Noting that Minister Robert had outlined his six priority areas for the Department:

- to transform DVA from a claims-focused organisation to a veteran-focused one;
- improving computer systems to enable service improvements;
- reducing claims processing times;
- improving transition assistance for those leaving the ADF;
- increasing the emphasis on rehabilitation; and
- linking ex-serving members and their families with quality mental health support.

It was noted that an opportunity existed to re-align the NAC Terms of Reference with the expertise and experience members bring to the Committee and the particular areas that would provide a significant value-add to VVCS services. Any change would also take account of the transition of VVCS's focus over the last decade, from a community support to a specialist veteran mental health service provider.

The Chair also updated the Committee on the research underway into wellbeing during the transition from military into civilian life. The Chair provided an overview of the Street and Ladder social enterprise program (tackling youth homelessness) that is similar to the Big Issue, which has a mixed funding model.

There was discussion regarding preferred clinical modalities (i.e. EMDR, CBT and CPT). It was noted that VVCS has built on the evidence-base for the treatment of military-related mental illness and invested in CPT staff training. This includes Phoenix Australia providing monthly clinical supervision. Staff receive external supervision as well as internal supervision to ensure a high level of clinical expertise.

4.1. Quantum of annual NAC meetings

Noting the discussion on the Committee's strategic direction, the NAC determined that the first meeting of 2016 would focus on cementing advice to the Minister on the future direction of the NAC. This advice would also guide recommendations in relation to the quantum of annual meetings.

The A/g National Manager detailed regular VVCS-Defence collaboration in a range of areas, noting regular national and regional meetings. The NAC noted the potential duplication resulting from focus groups with outreach providers and ex-service community members. Opportunities for the NAC to augment existing ex-service community stakeholder engagement work were explored. Also noted was the regular forums run across the country for external clinicians where the views of outreach providers are sought, as well as providing professional development opportunities focused on areas related to veteran issues. All NAC members were invited to attend these forums at their local Centre should they wish to.

It was determined that meetings in 2016 would focus on obtaining direct client feedback in regions to complement existing VVCS forums, such as Regional Consultative Forums and feedback mechanisms, including the online form.

5. Regional Director Report NSW/ACT

The Chair invited Ms Janet Carmichael to present an overview of VVCS services in the NSW/ACT region and thanked Ms Carmichael for her hospitality hosting the meeting.

6. National Manager Report

The NAC noted the report provided by the A/g National Manager, which provided an update of VVCS national activities in the following areas: service delivery, including counselling and group programs and an overview of recent client and Regional Consultative Forum feedback; strategic communications activities; progress in finalising the response to the Functional Review of VVCS, and recent clinical and VERA training initiatives.

The Committee noted the work of the VERA team and asked that the acknowledgement be passed onto the team.

7. Other Business

The Chair farewelled retiring member, Mrs Mel Pyrah and thanked her for her contributions over the past three years. The Committee wished Mrs Pyrah the very best for the future.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their time and their input.

The meeting was closed at 3.00pm.