

Independent assurance report on the
annual performance statements

Department of Veterans' Affairs

2019-20



Auditor-General for Australia



Independent assurance report on the annual performance statements

To the Minister for Finance

Qualified Conclusion

I have undertaken a reasonable assurance engagement of the 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Department).

In my opinion, except for the effects or possible effects of the matters described in the Basis for Qualified Conclusion section of my report, the attached 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements of the Department are prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the requirements of Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the *Public, Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (the Act).

Basis for Qualified Conclusion

Program 1.4.1.3 Client satisfaction

Division 2 of Part 2-3 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 (the Rule) requires the Department to measure and assess its performance in accordance with the method of measuring and assessing its performance set out in the corporate plan and Portfolio Budget Statements. As disclosed at footnote 7 on page 36 of the 2019–20 Annual Report, the Department is unable to report against the performance measure for Program 1.4.1.3 relating to 'Client Satisfaction' with the funeral benefits program due to the survey delivery method changing from online to paper based, and delay in receiving responses given other priorities. Because of this omission, the Department has not measured and reported against all of the material measures set out in the corporate plan and Portfolio Budget Statements and has therefore not complied with the Rule. Accordingly, the Department has not complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act.

Program 1.5.4 Quality (Achieving the Scheme's Outcomes)

The Department's collection of data through surveys in respect of the result reported against the performance measure for Program 1.5.4 relating to 'Quality (Achieving the Scheme's Outcomes)' was incomplete, as not all survey responses were received before the performance statements were completed. The Department has reported performance on a presumption that students had progressed through the relevant level of education. I was unable to perform alternative audit procedures to corroborate this presumption and, accordingly, I was unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to conclude whether the results reported against this measure were accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records. As a result, I was not able to conclude whether the reporting of the Department's annual performance statements with respect to this measure complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act.

Program 2.5.9 Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability

The result reported against the performance measure for Program 2.5.9 relating to 'Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability' is based on third party records. I was unable to obtain evidence from the Department's service provider that its reports were supported by appropriate information technology controls to provide evidence of the reliability of the underlying systems and reports from which the performance measure was reported. I was therefore unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to assess the completeness and accuracy of those third party records. Accordingly, I was unable to conclude whether the results reported against this measure were accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records. As a result, I was not able to conclude whether the reporting of the Department's annual performance statements with respect to this measure complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act.

Audit criteria

In order to assess whether the Department of Veterans' Affairs annual performance statements complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act, including providing information about the Department's performance in achieving its purposes, I applied the following criteria:

- whether the annual performance statements complied with Division 2 of Part 2-3 of the Rule;
- whether the performance criteria presented in the annual performance statements were appropriate;
- whether the Department had effective supporting frameworks to develop, gather, assess, monitor, assure and report in the annual performance statements; and
- whether the results reported against the performance criteria in the annual performance statements were accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records.

Accountable Authority's responsibilities

As the Accountable Authority of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Secretary is responsible under the Act for the preparation of annual performance statements that comply with the rules made under the Act. In preparing the annual performance statements, the Secretary is responsible for measuring and assessing the entity's performance in achieving its purpose and keeping records about the Department's performance in accordance with requirements prescribed by the Rule.

The Secretary is also responsible for such internal controls as the Secretary determines is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of annual performance statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Independence and quality control

I have complied with the independence and other relevant ethical requirements relating to assurance engagements, and applied Auditing Standard ASQC 1 *Quality Control for Firms that Perform Audits and Reviews of Financial Reports and Other Financial Information, Other Assurance Engagements and Related Services Engagement* in undertaking this assurance engagement.

Auditor-General's responsibilities

My responsibility is to express an independent opinion on the Department of Veterans' Affairs annual performance statements.

I conducted my audit in accordance with the Australian National Audit Office Auditing Standards, which include the relevant Standard on Assurance Engagements (ASAE) 3000 *Assurance Engagements Other than Audits or Reviews of Historical Financial Information* issued by the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board. In accordance with this standard I plan and perform my procedures to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the performance criteria and accompanying results presented in the annual performance statements of the Department accurately reflect the Department's performance in achieving its purpose and comply, in all material respects, with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014.

The nature, timing and extent of audit procedures depend on my judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, in the annual performance statements. In making these risk assessments, I obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the preparation of the annual performance statements in order to design procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances.

My procedures included:

- evaluation of the annual performance statements compliance with Part 2-3 Division 2 and 3 of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, and Part 2-3 Division 1, 2 and 3 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014;
- assessment of the appropriateness of the performance information presented in the Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plans and annual performance statements;
- evaluation of the supporting frameworks to develop, gather, assess, monitor, assure and report in the annual performance statements; and
- validation of the results reported against the performance criteria in the annual performance statements for completeness and accuracy and appropriate supporting records.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my qualified opinion.

Inherent limitations

Because of inherent limitations of an assurance engagement, it is possible that fraud, error or non-compliance may occur and not be detected. An assurance engagement is not designed to detect all instances of non-compliance of the annual performance statements with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 as it is not performed continuously throughout the period and the assurance procedures performed are undertaken on a test basis. The reasonable assurance conclusion expressed in this report has been formed on the above basis.

Australian National Audit Office



Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

Canberra
2 December 2020

Appendix A — Findings in respect of specific aspects of the engagement

During the conduct of the audit assessments and findings were made in respect of specific aspects of the engagement. These findings included below were addressed in the context of my engagement as a whole, and in forming my conclusion thereon, and I do not provide a separate conclusion on these matters.

Overview of engagement

In August 2019, the Minister for Finance requested that the Auditor-General conduct a pilot program of audits of annual performance statements in consultation with the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA). Following the request, the Auditor-General decided to commence a pilot program under section 15 of the *Auditor-General Act 1997* and is applying the performance statements auditing methodology developed over recent years, to the 2019–20 performance statements of three entities. The Department of Veterans' Affairs is one of the three selected entities.

Overview of the applicable criteria

I have used the criteria, described in my independent assurance report above, to assess the 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. In performing my assurance engagement and preparing this appendix, the following relevant considerations and interpretations were applied.

Compliance

Whether the annual performance statements complied with the requirements of the Act and the Rule and in doing so, met the objects of the Act. In considering compliance, the most important provisions considered were subsection 39(2) of the Act and section 16F of the Rule.

Appropriateness

Whether the performance criteria presented in the Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plan and annual performance statements were appropriate. In considering appropriateness, the most important aspects of appropriateness were the relevance, reliability and completeness of the performance criteria:

- relevant – individually, a performance criterion contributes to conclusions in regard to an entity's progress in fulfilling its purpose that assist users' decision making;
- reliable – individually, a performance criterion allows for reasonably consistent assessment of an entity's progress in fulfilling its purpose; and
- complete – as a group, performance criteria allow for the overall assessment of an entity's progress in fulfilling its purpose to inform users' decision making.

Supporting frameworks

Whether the Department had effective supporting frameworks to develop, gather, assess, monitor, assure and report performance information in the annual performance statements. In considering the supporting frameworks, the most important aspects were effectiveness of the following processes:

- coordination and collation of performance information;
- systems and methodologies for the collection and reporting of performance information; and
- assurance over the annual performance statements.

Completeness, accuracy and records

Whether the results reported by the Department against the performance criteria in the annual performance statements were accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records.

Materiality

The concept of materiality is applied when making an assessment against the above criteria. Failure to meet one or some of the criteria characteristics will not necessarily impact the overall assessment and form of audit conclusion.

Audit findings and observations

Have the annual performance statements complied with Division 2 of Part 2-3 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014?

The ANAO reviewed the 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements and concluded that the annual performance statements complied with Division 2 of Part 2-3 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014, with the exception of the matters outlined in the Basis for Qualified Conclusion section above.

Are the performance criteria presented in the Department's Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plan and 2019–20 annual performance statements appropriate?

The ANAO reviewed the performance criteria that are effectiveness or efficiency measures or effectiveness or efficiency proxy measures as meeting the threshold for reporting on the achievement of the Department's purposes.

Not all measures included in the Department's Portfolio Budget Statements and corporate plan met this threshold and a number were removed from reporting by DVA within the performance statements to enhance the readability and usefulness of the performance information presented. All performance criteria that met the threshold were considered to be of equal importance in measuring the achievement of the entity's purpose.

The performance criteria and relevant performance information in the 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements were assessed as appropriate to measure the achievement of the Department's purposes.

Did the Department have effective supporting frameworks to develop, gather, assess, monitor, assure and report in the annual performance statements?

The ANAO examined the Department's internal systems, processes, procedures, including governance and assurance mechanisms such as the audit committee, to develop, gather, assess, monitor, assure and report in the 2019–20 Annual Performance Statements. With the exception of the matters outlined in the Basis for Qualified Conclusion section above, the supporting framework was assessed as effective.

Are the results reported by the Department against the performance criteria in the performance statements accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records?

The ANAO performed testing of the results against the performance criteria in the annual performance statements for completeness and accuracy. The results of performance criteria were mostly complete and accurate and supported by appropriate records with the exception of the matters outlined above in the Basis for Qualified Conclusion section above.

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Annual performance statements

Statement by the accountable authority

I, as the accountable authority of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, present the 2019–20 annual performance statements of the department, as required under paragraph 39(1)(a) and 39(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). In my opinion, these annual performance statements are based on properly maintained records, accurately reflect the performance of the department, and comply with subsection 39(2) of the PGPA Act.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liz Cosson', is positioned above the printed name.

Liz Cosson AM CSC

Secretary

Department of Veterans' Affairs

18 September 2020

Overview of our purpose, outcomes, programs and activities

The annual performance statements present our achievements against the outcomes, programs, performance measures and targets set out in the DVA Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20 (PBS) and the Corporate Plan 2019–2023.

As outlined in the corporate plan, we are reviewing the design and implementation of our performance measures and reporting framework to ensure they can better support decision-making and drive continual improvement of our services. As part of our ongoing systematic review of performance measures, and in developing the corporate plan, we have revised and updated some of the performance measures that appear in the PBS.

In 2019–20, DVA pursued its purpose and key activities by implementing appropriate budget programs that deliver our three outcomes on behalf of the Australian Government.

Changes to DVA's performance measures

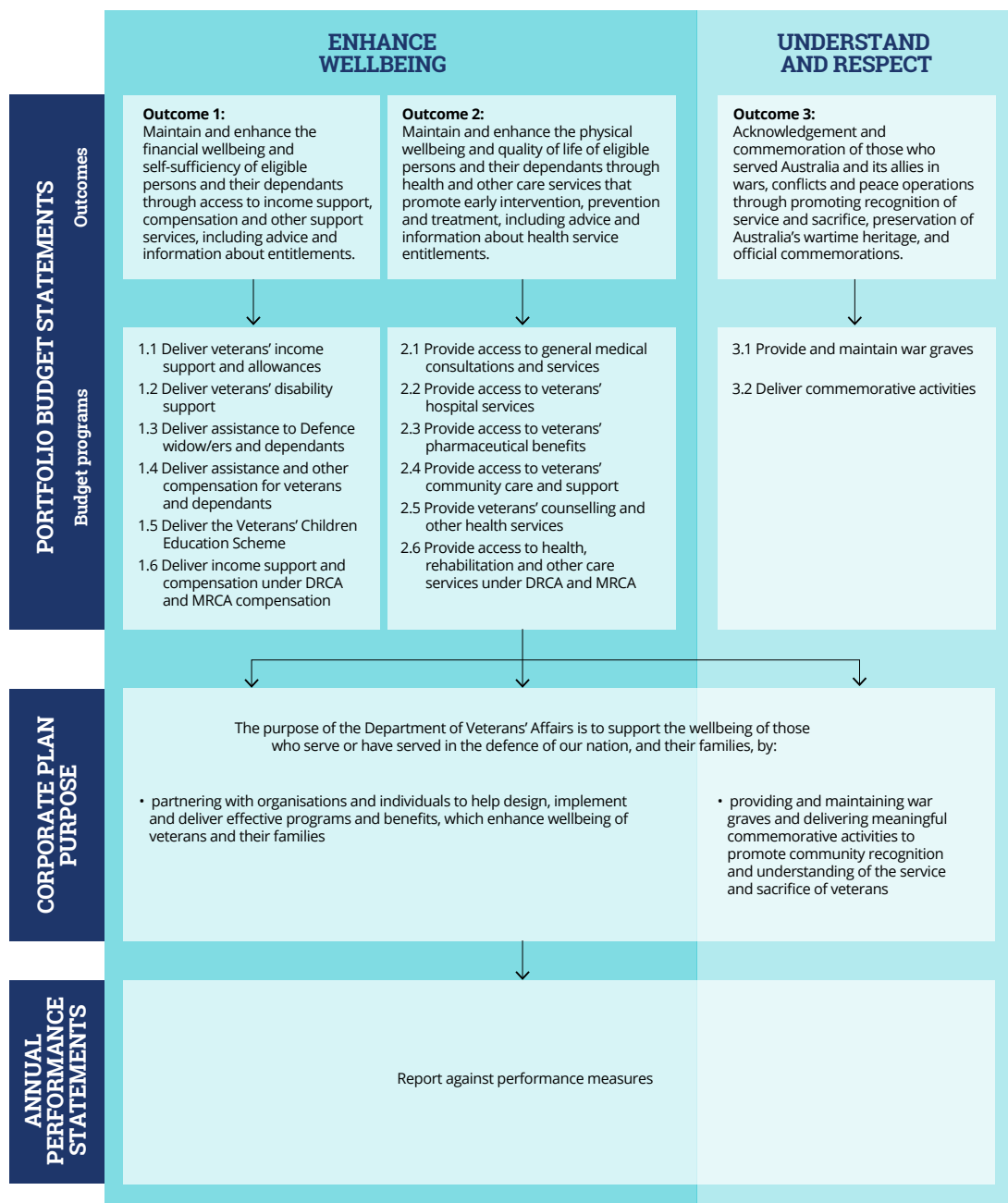
During 2019–20 DVA undertook a review of its Corporate Plan 2019–2023 and performance measures. Areas of improvement were identified for DVA's purpose, key activities and performance measures. As a result, DVA clarified its purpose statement to clearly articulate how it will achieve its purpose and the outcome of achieving its purpose. Also, we:

- ensured our activities were more closely aligned to the purpose
- removed additional information that detracted from the purpose (the vision and mission statement) and revised the purpose and key activities
- included additional explanatory material with the performance measures to improve understanding
- removed reporting against 23 performance measures that did not directly align to our purpose.

As this review took place in June 2020 it was considered not appropriate to reissue the Corporate Plan 2019–2023. Therefore the revised purpose, key activities and performance measures have been incorporated into the Corporate Plan 2020–2021. These changes were important to provide a clearer picture to readers of DVA's purpose and how it will measure its performance.

The relationship between performance information in the PBS, corporate plan and annual performance statements is outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Relationship between performance information in the portfolio budget statements, corporate plan and annual performance statements



How we measure performance

DVA's performance measures assess all aspects of the department's performance. The annual performance statements show what the department has achieved under its performance measures and against the purpose set out in the Corporate Plan 2019–2023, noting the changes which were made as discussed on page 29. The DVA annual performance statements were developed in accordance with the PGPA Act and Department of Finance guidelines and structured to mirror the layout of the performance measures in the corporate plan.

The majority of our performance is measured through:

- timeliness
- quality correctness rate
- client satisfaction
- quality of service.

Timeliness

Our timeliness measures assess the time taken to process claims. They ensure that DVA is promptly responding to requests for benefits. So that DVA is continually improving, we set our targets as improvements on the previous year's results.

Quality correctness rate

Every month DVA conducts quality assurance assessments on a statistical random sample of claims. Quality assurance officers use assessment criteria relevant to the function—initial liability, permanent impairment, incapacity and so on. All aspects of the claim, including eligibility, entitlements received, decision-making and processing—are assessed for correctness.

To ensure independence, quality assurance officers are separate from delegates who process claims. All findings, recommendations or comments are recorded in the quality assurance system. All results are reported quarterly. Errors are deviations from the entitlements an eligible veteran or family member should have received; they may involve both financial and non-financial impacts, including, for example, failure to formally notify a decision.

Client satisfaction

Client satisfaction is measured through a quarterly independent survey by ORIMA Research. This is either a survey of clients statistically selected at random or a census of all clients within a program. The survey has a confidence interval of 95 per cent. Over 6,000 clients were surveyed in 2019–20 through an online survey.¹

Quality of service

The quality of service measure compares the number of clients who access services with the number of complaints about being unable to access services or about the quality of the service. This data is obtained from Services Australia. A report from a database of all client feedback identifies the number of complaints for the program. This is assessed annually.

¹ This is a specific survey for clients receiving benefits. DVA also undertakes an annual Client Satisfaction Survey on a broad range of topics. The results of the Client Satisfaction Survey are available on the DVA website.

Efficiency

The timeliness of delivering services is an efficiency proxy—it can give an indication of efficiency over time, as we are able to process more claims in a shorter time frame. Due to a range of factors, such as increasing volumes and backlogs, and the time taken by third parties to provide supporting evidence for claims, the percentage of claims decided within target time frames for many programs has deteriorated. However, our efficiency can also be demonstrated through the funding we receive from Government to deliver our programs and the level of output of those programs. In 2019–20 we saw efficiency improvements in our claims processing through the average cost per decision falling by approximately 16 per cent over all *Veterans Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA)*, *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA)* and *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA)* decisions. This indicates that we are becoming more efficient at claims processing, as we are able to deliver more decisions at a lower unit cost.

Efficiency measures are key to demonstrating we are improving our processes and systems, and becoming more efficient over time while maintaining quality standards. This is a key part of our transformation journey through our Veteran Centric Reform work. We are investigating ways to measure efficiency and will look to introduce formal efficiency measures in the 2020–21 annual performance statements.

Overview of performance

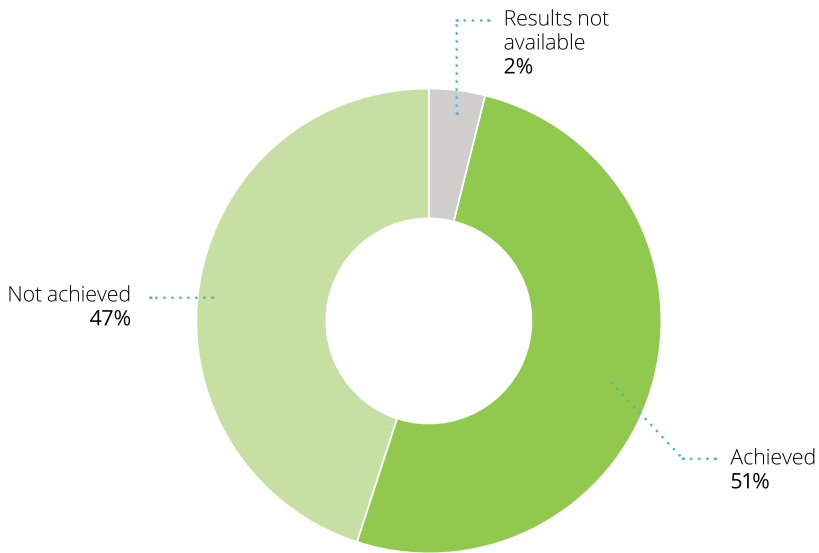
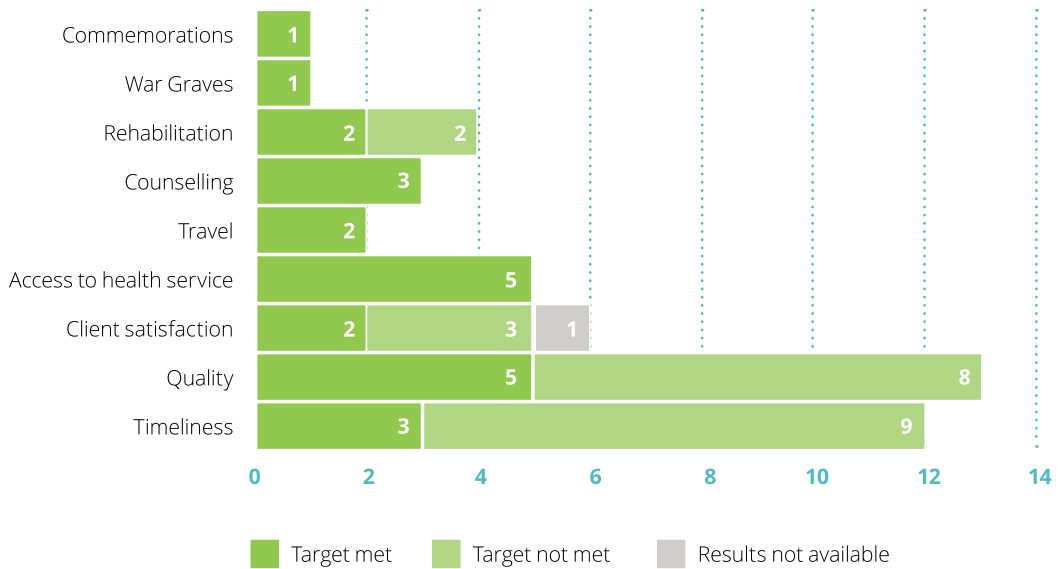
In 2019–20, DVA initiatives enhanced the physical and financial wellbeing of veterans and their families. We successfully connected veterans to the quality, evidence-based services and supports they needed at the time they needed them most. Through government investment in claims processing, we achieved considerable success in improving outcomes for veterans and their families.

DVA successfully delivered all three outcomes across our purpose and key activities. We achieved 51 per cent (24 measures) of our performance measures reported in these statements, while 47 per cent (22 measures) were not achieved and another 2 per cent (one measure) were not available to report on. Twenty-three measures were not reported on, as discussed on page 29.

Of the 22 performance measures that did not meet their target, 20 related to outcome 1 and two related to outcome 2. However it should be noted there were eight measures, all relating to outcome 1, which were within 5 percentage points of reaching their target. The majority of targets not met related to timeliness measures (nine) and quality measures (eight). Significant increases in the number of claims affected our ability to meet timeliness targets for many of these claim types. We are committed to reducing these time frames.

We continue to focus on increased training, procedural support and policy advice so that we can make quality decisions in accordance with our Acts: the DRCA, MRCA and the VEA. Our continued focus on quality improvement will ensure that veterans and their family members are receiving all of the benefits and support to which they are entitled.

Figure 4 provides a snapshot of our overall performance. The achievement ratings reflect the percentage of yearly measures achieved and not achieved; and the results that are not available to report across our purposes of ‘enhance wellbeing’ and ‘understand and respect’.

Figure 4: Performance snapshot, 2019–20**Performance by measures**

Enhance wellbeing

Support the wellbeing of those who serve or have served in the defence of our nation, and their families by partnering with organisations and individuals to help design, implement and deliver effective programs and benefits, which enhance wellbeing of veterans and their families.

Outcome 1

Maintain and enhance the financial wellbeing and self-sufficiency of eligible persons and their dependants through access to income support, compensation and other support services, including advice and information about entitlements.

Key performance results

The success of our work under outcome 1 is measured by our achievements in three categories: timeliness, quality and client satisfaction.

Our PBS and the Corporate Plan 2019–2023 set out performance measures and targets for each program under outcome 1. Table 1 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2019–20.

Table 1: Outcome 1 performance measures and results

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 1.1: Deliver veterans' income support and allowances			PBS pp 36, CP p 17		
1.1.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of new claims processed within 30 days ¹	Claims: >71.7%	71.7%	80.20%	✓
1.1.1.2	Timeliness: The percentage of pensioner-initiated reviews (PIRs) processed within 10 days ^{1,2}	PIRs: >53.2%	53.2%	49.35%	✗
1.1.2	Quality: Correctness rate	Claims: >95%	98.24%	97.58%	✓
		PIRs: >95%	96.99%	98.82%	✓
1.1.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ⁵	80%	n/a	65.70%	✗
Program 1.2: Deliver veterans' disability support			PBS p 37, CP p 17		
1.2.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 100 days ¹	>43.9%	43.9%	33.83%	✗
1.2.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	93.6%	91.10%	✗
1.2.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ⁵	80%	n/a	66.85%	✗
Program 1.3: Deliver assistance to Defence widow/ers and dependants			PBS p 38, CP p 18		
1.3.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 30 days ¹	>53.2%	53.2%	51.40%	✗
1.3.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	92%	93.40%	✗
1.3.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ⁵	80%	n/a	88.24%	✓

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018-19 Actual result	2019-20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 1.4: Deliver assistance and other compensation for veterans and dependants			PBS p 39, CP p 18		
Funeral benefits					
1.4.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 10 days ¹	>86.4%	86.4%	84.23%	✗
1.4.1.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	96.0%	98.08%	✓
1.4.1.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ⁵	80%	n/a		Unavailable ⁷
Defence Home Loans					
1.4.2.1	Timeliness: The number of days within which 50% of claims will be finalised (days)		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
1.4.2.2	Quality: Correctness rate		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
Program 1.5: Deliver the Veterans' Children Education Scheme			PBS p 40, CP p 19		
1.5.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 28 days ¹	>89.5%	89.5%	53.76%	✗
1.5.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	100%	96.30%	✓
1.5.3	Client satisfaction: Percentage of responses to the annual Education Schemes Satisfaction Survey indicating that clients thought the support provided helped the student reach their academic potential ³	>75%	85.1%	88.46%	✓
1.5.4	Quality (Achieving the Schemes' Outcomes): Percentage of the Education Schemes' clients progressing through each level of their education or career training ⁴	>85%	95%	99.04%	✓
Program 1.6: Deliver income support and compensation under MRCA and DRCA			PBS p 41, CP pp 19-20		
1.6.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA liability claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	>37.4%	37.4%	28.20%	✗
1.6.1.2	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA permanent impairment (PI) claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	>63.7%	63.7%	23.83%	✗
1.6.1.3	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA incapacity claims processed (determined) within 50 days ¹	>60.6%	60.6%	62.69%	✓
1.6.2	Quality: Correctness rate of DRCA claims				
	- DRCA liability claims	>95%	94.3%	92.80%	✗
	- DRCA permanent impairment claims	>95%	95.2%	90.30%	✗
	- DRCA incapacity claims	>95%	95.1%	89.80%	✗
1.6.3.1	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA liability claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	>67%	67%	41.62%	✗

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
1.6.3.2	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA permanent impairment claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	>62%	62.0%	25.80%	✗
1.6.3.3	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA incapacity claims processed (determined) within 50 days ¹	>57%	57.0%	67.76%	✓
1.6.4	Quality: Correctness rate of MRCA claims				
	- MRCA liability claims	>95%	93.0%	90.20%	✗
	- MRCA permanent impairment claims	>95%	87.5%	83.20%	✗
	- MRCA incapacity claims	>95%	91.1%	85.80%	✗
1.6.5	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ⁵	80%	n/a	65.65%	✗

CP = Corporate Plan 2019–2023; DRCA = *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*; MRCA = *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20

¹ Timeliness performance reporting measures have been changed from the median number of days to process claims within a target time frame to the percentage of claims processed within the target time frame for 2019–20.

² Reviews of a pensioner's entitlements as a result of the client updating their personal or financial circumstances.

³ All clients are sent an online survey to complete each year. The survey asks clients to rate the support provided to them by DVA staff on a scale of: 'made no difference to academic outcomes'; 'effective'; or 'very effective'.

⁴ A student's level of education is collected and compared in November and March to identify whether the student has progressed in their education—that is, advanced from one year level to the next. Progression indicates the scheme is supporting clients to achieve their education goals.

⁵ This is a new measure for 2019–20. The new measure is established to assess the client experience in attempting to access their legal entitlements.

⁶ This measure has been removed as a result of the review of DVA's performance measures. For further information refer to page 29.

⁷ The results of this survey have been delayed due to the delivery method changing from online to paper based.

Table 2: Outcome 1 performance criterion categories

Performance criterion category	Performance criterion number
Timeliness	1.1.1.1, 1.1.1.2, 1.2.1, 1.3.1, 1.4.1.1, 1.5.1, 1.6.1.1, 1.6.1.2, 1.6.1.3, 1.6.3.1, 1.6.3.2, 1.6.3.3
Quality	1.1.2, 1.2.2, 1.3.2, 1.4.1.2, 1.5.2, 1.5.4, 1.6.2, 1.6.4
Client satisfaction	1.1.3, 1.2.3, 1.3.3, 1.4.1.3, 1.5.3, 1.6.5

Analysis of performance against outcome 1

Timeliness

In 2019–20, we continued to exceed our timeliness targets for new income support claims (program 1.1), DRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.1.3) and MRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.3.3). Significant improvements could be seen across each of these programs. We also came within a 5 per cent variance of meeting timeliness targets for pensioner-initiated reviews (PIRs) (program 1.1), war widow/ers pension (program 1.3.1) and funeral benefits (program 1.4.1).

DVA has continued to experience an increase in claim numbers as a result of the success of the Veteran Centric Reform—Putting Veterans and their Families First Program and the changing nature of our veteran population and defence campaigns. In 2019–20 there was a further increase of approximately 13,600 claims (15 per cent) across the four major contemporary compensation streams, in addition to the 83 per cent increase in 2018–19. In these streams, we were unable to meet the timeliness targets set.

To address the increase in claims, in late 2019 the Government invested an additional \$20 million to enable DVA to hire additional contracted staff, including former employees with claims processing experience. In addition, an internal taskforce of DVA staff was redeployed to assist with claims processing.

The additional funding and staffing helped us to achieve excellent results. For example, there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of MRCA permanent impairment claims (program 1.6.3.2) decided since January 2020 compared to 2018–19 levels. The number of active MRCA permanent impairment claims under investigation is now the lowest since June 2019. While this outcome is not reflected in the timeliness results for the year, we are positioned well to improve on our performance in 2020–21.

Building on this success, the Government will invest a further \$11.6 million in 2020–21 for DVA to recruit additional contracted staff to focus on liability claims. We expect to see similar improvements in the numbers of decisions made and active cases under investigation.

In addition to increased claims processing resources, DVA is implementing a range of business and process improvements to support timely decisions. Examples are a national standardised framework for funeral benefits (program 1.4.1) and the automation of qualifying service claims in MyService for new income support claims (program 1.1). As a result of business improvements in pensioner-initiated reviews (PIRs), timeliness improved throughout the year even though the increasing complexity of clients' personal circumstances, the increasing sophistication of their financial affairs and the fluctuating economic climate meant that a greater level of investigation for these reviews was required.

Under the *Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Act 2019*, the Government made a commitment to process MRCA liability and permanent impairment claims within 90 days. This came into effect on 1 November 2019. The timeliness achieved for those claims lodged on or after 1 November 2019 was 30.81 per cent for MRCA initial liability claims and 23.64 per cent for MRCA permanent impairment claims.

Quality

In 2019–20 we continued to exceed our quality targets for new income support claims, PIRs (program 1.1), funeral benefits (program 1.4) and the Veterans' Children Education Scheme (program 1.5).

DVA continued to improve the quality of work in outcome 1 program areas by using issues and trends identified by the quality assurance program to manage resource allocation, improve training and development packages, target policy and procedural support, improve information technology support, and engage in performance management.

The quality results in veteran disability support (program 1.2.2), MRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.3.3) and DRCA permanent impairment claims (program 1.6.2.2) continued to improve over the year. However, our results in other areas, such as VEA war widows (program 1.3.2) and the Veterans' Children Education Scheme (1.5.2), declined in the second half of the year. The quality of decision-making under outcome 1 programs was affected by the increased intake of compensation claims, the engagement of additional contracted staff and the focus on addressing processing times.

In 2019–20 we focused on training new staff and cross-skilling staff across the Acts. This work will have a positive effect on quality in the future and ensure that clients are receiving the benefits and entitlements to which they are entitled.

Client satisfaction

In 2019–20 a new qualitative measure was introduced to assess the level of satisfaction amongst clients in their dealings with DVA when accessing their entitlements. In 2020 a new Client Benefits Client Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by ORIMA Research Pty Ltd on behalf of DVA. The survey gathered client feedback on their claims experiences between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The online survey was completed by 1,674 veterans, representing a 16 per cent response rate. The preliminary results indicate that around two-thirds of veterans are satisfied with the customer service they receive when dealing with DVA delegates. The key areas for improvement include time taken to process claims and being informed of progress with their claim. ORIMA is also undertaking a mail-out survey on behalf of DVA of clients accessing funeral benefits for the same period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. These survey results are expected to be available later in 2020.

Under the Veterans' Children Education Scheme and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme (the Schemes), an education allowance is paid to eligible children of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members who have died or been severely injured as a result of service. DVA understands each of the recipients' academic goals are unique. Therefore, the Schemes also provide for special assistance, student support services, and guidance and counselling for eligible primary, secondary and tertiary full-time study students within Australia.

In the 2020 Education Schemes Satisfaction Survey (1.5.3), 88.46 per cent of respondents felt the support they received under the Schemes was effective or very effective in helping them reach their individual academic potential. This is a 3.5 per cent increase from the 2019 survey and surpasses the target satisfaction rate of 75 per cent.

Over the next 12 months, DVA will be evaluating the Schemes to ensure the support provided to eligible students is targeted and meets their educational needs now and into the future. This work may result in the Schemes' performance measures being adjusted.

Achievements in 2019–20

More services and support

DVA continued to provide services to veterans and their families as well as delivering a range of additional payments and services in response to natural disasters and the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 26,000 DVA clients who receive a means-tested income support payment lived in areas affected by the 2019–2020 summer bushfires. Natural disaster protocols were implemented to ensure that these clients were supported—we prioritised decisions on granting or increasing payments and reviews of existing debt recovery arrangements; and we paused the issuing of new debt notices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DVA delivered government support payments to approximately 233,000 clients who received the Economic Support Payment. The total amount paid as part of this government stimulus package was \$167.4 million. This payment will be ongoing for any client who becomes eligible due to a backdated grant or a qualifying benefit on or before 12 April 2020.

As part of the Australian Government's response to the economic impact of COVID-19, students who receive payments under the Schemes at similar rates to students on Youth Allowance are eligible for the temporary Coronavirus Supplement. This covers students aged 16 and over who are receiving education allowance at any rate and those receiving education allowance at the living away from home, homeless or double orphan rate. From 27 April to 30 June 2020, 1,266 recipients of Schemes payments received the Coronavirus Supplement.

The Provisional Access to Medical Treatment Trial enables eligible veterans to receive medical and allied health treatment on a provisional basis for one or more of the 20 most commonly accepted conditions for ex-serving members of the ADF. The trial was extended in 2019–20 to ensure veterans continue to be able to access medical treatment while we work to reduce the backlog of liability claims.

We were able to achieve these initiatives and many others at a time when DVA staff were transitioning to working from home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the transition, timeliness and quality performance were maintained, and for many programs they increased.

Partner Service Pension eligibility alignment

The Australian Government provides continuing financial support to people who separate from their veteran partner. From 20 September 2019, as part of the 2019–20 Budget, \$6.2 million was provided to change the eligibility rules for Partner Service Pension (PSP) to ensure former partners of veterans, regardless of marital status, receive equitable treatment in respect of PSP, including in situations involving domestic violence. Previously, a married PSP recipient could continue to receive payment for 12 months after separating from their veteran partner or until they divorced or entered into a new de facto relationship, whichever occurred first. However, de facto PSP recipients ceased to be eligible for the payment as soon as the relationship with the veteran partner ended. As of 20 September 2019, PSP is available to de facto former partners as well as married ones. Former partners can receive payments for up to 12 months post-separation. Where special domestic circumstances such as domestic violence apply, PSP also allows former partners (including de facto partners) to remain on PSP after the 12-month period until they enter a new relationship, thereby ensuring continuing support for partners separating due to domestic violence.

Veterans' Employment Program

The Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program (VEP) increases employment opportunities for veterans by raising awareness across industry of the skills and experience veterans can bring to the civilian workplace. In 2019–20:

- the number of organisations making a public commitment to support the employment of veterans by signing the Veterans Employment Commitment increased to over 280
- the third Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards were held. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the awards were delivered successfully via an online channel for the first time
- engagement activities, including showcasing the VEP at Defence Transition Seminars, were conducted
- resources were provided through the VEP website (www.veteransemployment.gov.au). Resources included veteran success stories to further reinforce the message that hiring a veteran is good for business.

Work continued on the Support for Employment (SFE) program, which was announced in the 2018–19 Budget. The program will provide additional support to veterans who are finding it challenging to transition to the civilian workforce. The SFE program will give veterans practical assistance, including assistance with skills translation, resume preparation and coaching. Legislative authority to enable the commencement of SFE has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19 on Parliament sitting weeks. However, the program will commence in 2020–21.

In 2019–20 the new Enhanced Employment for Veterans grants program was successfully introduced. The program was announced in the 2019–20 Budget. The Government announced that grants will be provided to RSL Australia (\$6 million), Soldier On (\$6 million) and Disaster Relief Australia (formerly known as Team Rubicon Australia) (\$3 million) to deliver innovative programs to assist veterans to find meaningful employment. Payments to these organisations commenced from January 2020. However, they have all had to adjust their project schedules due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Summary

DVA has had a remarkable year. We have continued to see unprecedented levels of claims being lodged as a result of the connection to and engagement with veterans and their families because of the success of the Veteran Centric Reform—Putting Veterans and Their Families First Program. More than 110,000 claims were lodged through MyService in 2019–20.

This ongoing significant increase in claims has affected our ability to meet timeliness targets in many of these claim types. DVA is committed to reducing these time frames and, through government investment in claims processing, has achieved considerable success in improving outcomes for veterans and their families. At the same time, we continue to focus on increased training, procedural support and policy advice to deliver quality decisions in accordance with the Acts. Our continued focus on quality improvement will ensure that clients are receiving the benefits and entitlements to which they are entitled.

Outcome 2

Maintain and enhance the physical wellbeing and quality of life of eligible persons and their dependants through health and other care services that promote early intervention, prevention and treatment, including advice and information about health service entitlements.

Key performance results

The success of our work under outcome 2 is measured by our achievements in four categories: access to health services, travel, counselling and rehabilitation.

Our PBS and corporate plan set out performance measures and targets for each program under outcome 2. Table 3 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2019–20.

Table 3: Outcome 2 performance measures and results

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 2.1: Provide access to general medical consultations and services				PBS p 50, CP p 20	
2.1.1	Quality of service: Ensure arrangements are in place for the access to and delivery of quality general and specialist medical and dental services for DVA Health Card holders - Number of clients accessing services versus the number who have registered a complaint in relation to un-met access and/or quality	>99%	99.95%	99.95%	✓
2.1.2	Maintain a schedule of general and specialist medical and dental services for DVA Health Card holders that reflects trends in the delivery of health care services - Percentage of total medical and dental services that are assessed through the DVA fee schedule		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
Program 2.2: Provide access to veterans' hospital services				PBS p 51, CP p 21	
2.2.1	Quality of service: Ensure arrangements are in place for the access to and delivery of quality private and public hospital services for DVA Health Card holders - Number of clients accessing services versus the number who have registered a complaint in relation to un-met access and/or quality	>99%	99.94%	99.96%	✓

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018-19 Actual result	2019-20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 2.3: Provide access to veterans' pharmaceutical benefits				PBS p 52, CP p 21	
2.3.1	Quality of service: Ensure arrangements are in place for the access to and delivery of quality pharmaceutical services for DVA Health Card holders - Number of clients accessing services versus the number who have registered a complaint in relation to un-met access and/or quality	>99%	99.98%	99.99%	✓
Program 2.4: Provide access to veterans' community care and support				PBS p 53, CP p 21	
2.4.1	Quality of service: Ensure arrangements are in place for the access to and delivery of quality community care services for DVA Health Card holders - Number of clients accessing services versus the number who have registered a complaint in relation to un-met access and/or quality	>99%	99.59%	99.61%	✓
Program 2.5: Provide veterans' counselling and other health services				PBS p 54, CP p 22	
Access to services					
2.5.1	Quality of service: Ensure arrangements are in place for the access and delivery of quality mental and allied health services for DVA Health Card holders - Number of clients accessing services versus the number who have registered a complaint in relation to un-met access and/or quality	>99%	99.5%	99.55%	✓
2.5.2	Maintain a schedule of allied services for DVA Health Card holders that reflects trends in the delivery of health care services - Percentage of total allied services that are accessed through the DVA fee schedule		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
Travel					
PBS 55, CP p 22					
2.5.3	Target percentage of claims for reimbursement processed within the Service Charter timeframe (28 days) ²	95%	99.93%	99.94%	✓
2.5.4	Degree of complaints about arranged travel relative to the quantity of bookings	<0.05%	0.02%	0.03%	✓
Open Arms					
2.5.5	Percentage of clients in receipt of an episode of care, who access an Open Arms clinician (centre based or outreach) within two weeks of intake and assessment occurring	>65%	65.8%	90.15%	✓
2.5.6	Client satisfaction ¹	>80%	94.2%	90.52%	✓
2.5.9	Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability ³	80%	n/a	98.24%	✓
2.5.10	Consultation and Community Engagement is maintained annually		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
2.7.1	Accreditation as a Mental Health Service is maintained		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme					
2.5.7	Clients with successful return to work ⁴	>50%	68.0%	73.91%	✓

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 2.6: Provide access to health, rehabilitation and other care services under DRCA and MRCA					📖 PBS p 56, CP p 23
2.6.1	Timeliness: The percentage of rehabilitation assessments that were made within 30 days of referral for assessment	75%	82.0%	88.20%	✓
2.6.2	Quality: Percentage of clients where rehabilitation goals were met or exceeded	75%	75.0%	68.88%	✗
2.6.3	Client satisfaction: An annual survey of client satisfaction with the rehabilitation program ⁵	75%	79.03%	68.30% ⁷	✗
A1.1: Partner with other Commonwealth agencies including Defence, Health and Services Australia (previously the Department of Human Services)					📖 CP p 23
A1.1	Governance arrangements are established and reviewed in accordance with respective agency agreements		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		
A1.2: Engage with stakeholders including ex-service organisations (ESOs) and Defence					📖 CP p 23
A1.2	Consultative fora are established with ESOs and Defence communities and reviewed in accordance with the NCF		This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ⁶		

CP = Corporate Plan 2019–2023; DRCA = *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*; MRCA = *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*; NCF = National Consultation Framework; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20; Open Arms = Open Arms—Veterans & Families Counselling

¹ Client satisfaction is measured by a questionnaire. Satisfaction questionnaires are offered by clinicians at the end of the period of counselling. All clients who answer 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' to the question 'How satisfied were you with the counselling provided to you?' will be measured as satisfied. The questionnaire is not compulsory for clients to complete.

² The target percentage for this performance criterion has been changed from 100% to 95%.

³ This was a new measure for 2019–20. It assesses the percentage of calls received by the Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre answered in less than 180 seconds.

⁴ This measure is assessed by calculating the number of clients who returned to any form of work at the closure of the rehabilitation plan, over the total number of plan closures for the period.

⁵ Client satisfaction is measured through a monthly independent survey by ORIMA Research of DVA clients who have recently completed the rehabilitation program.

⁶ This measure has been removed as a result of the review of DVA's performance measures. For further information refer to page 29.

⁷ This figure is based on July 2019 to May 2020 rehabilitation case closures and a simplified calculation methodology relative to the result for 2018–19. Therefore any variation in results from 2018–19 to 2019–20 cannot be interpreted as a trend in changes to overall client satisfaction with the DVA rehabilitation program.

Table 4: Outcome 2 performance criterion categories

Performance criterion category	Performance criterion number
Access to health services	2.1.1, 2.2.1, 2.3.1, 2.4.1, 2.5.1
Travel	2.5.2, 2.5.3
Counselling	2.5.4, 2.5.5, 2.5.6
Rehabilitation	2.5.7, 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3

Analysis of performance against outcome 2

Access to health services

Health treatment provided under outcome 2 programs is generally arranged between the provider and the client. Providers send claims for payment directly to Services Australia, which reimburses the provider on DVA's behalf. DVA measures the success of this program by comparing the number of complaints registered by clients compared to the number of clients who accessed services.

In 2019–20 the number of clients who registered complaints was less than 1 per cent of the total number of clients who accessed services under these programs. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the treatment available on the schedules. Complaints relating to these programs are usually made where requests for treatment that is outside the schedules have been declined. In most cases this is because there are services available within the schedules that are considered more clinically appropriate.

Travel

Under the Repatriation Transport Scheme, DVA can reimburse some travel costs where veterans have paid to travel to medical appointments or to get medical evidence. All compliments and complaints received regarding travel for treatment are recorded in the Client Feedback Management System. This data is used to identify issues and inconsistencies in service delivery. In conjunction with contract management, it also allows us to target transport services that need to be improved. DVA deals directly with veterans and transport providers on a daily basis so that issues can be dealt with and resolved immediately as they arise.

In 2019–20 the number of complaints about arranged travel, relative to the quantity of bookings, was 0.03 per cent. This figure is lower than the target of 0.05 per cent per quantity of bookings. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the Repatriation Transport Scheme and the ability of DVA to address issues quickly and efficiently.

The Service Charter time frame for processing claims for reimbursement is 28 days. The performance target for reimbursement of 95 per cent of travel claims within 28 days was met and the processing figure of 99.94 per cent was better than the processing figure of 99.3 per cent for 2018–19. The performance target was previously 100 per cent within 28 days. However, this target was varied for the 2019–20 financial year to accommodate potential external impacts on processing activities.

The change in performance target has not affected our processing activities. In 2019–20 our processing percentages improved, and they remained in the high 99 per cent range for the financial year.

It is pleasing to note that performance targets and quality of service have not been hindered by the fact that MRCA and DRCA claims are processed manually rather than by an automated processing system.

The consolidation of processing for travel claims under all three Acts—VEA, MRCA and DRCA—is continuing, and processing results indicate continued strong performance.

Counselling

The Client Assist Contact Centre (Client Assist) national intake call centre was established in February 2018. Client Assist has proven to be effective in simplifying the client experience and connecting individuals to services more efficiently. The tailored and consistent Client Assist model was expanded in April 2020 to deliver after-hours support.

Throughout 2019–20, each month Open Arms—Veterans & Families Counselling (Open Arms) has maintained over 93 per cent of total calls answered in under 180 seconds (program 2.5.6), exceeding the measure target of 80 per cent.

In 2019–20 there was a significant increase in demand for Open Arms services. Open Arms supported a total of 30,894 clients—a 24 per cent increase from 2018–19. Open Arms has simplified the way in which this measure is calculated. Open Arms is tracking above the target measure, with 90.15 per cent of individuals allocated an appointment with a clinician within two weeks of their initial intake.

During 2019–20 Open Arms maintained a high level of client satisfaction, exceeding their 80 per cent target and achieving 90 per cent satisfaction.

Rehabilitation

During 2019–20, DVA undertook extensive work to improve the quality of services delivered by rehabilitation providers. For example, we:

- engaged rehabilitation providers in a formal contractual arrangement, which includes performance measures and monitoring, and clear expectations about how rehabilitation services should be delivered for DVA clients
- published a series of updated procedural guidelines to support rehabilitation providers to deliver consistent and quality services on behalf of DVA
- established a digital community for rehabilitation providers via GovTeams, enabling DVA to deliver targeted and consistent messaging, information, training and resources to support service delivery
- proactively identified provider education and training needs, establishing a forward plan for training delivery, and continued to deliver relevant education and training via a dedicated Stakeholder Engagement Manager.

As a result of these initiatives, in 2019–20 DVA exceeded the Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme target (program 2.5.7), with the majority of clients successfully returning to work after completing their rehabilitation plan. The 2019–20 result was a further improvement on the positive result we achieved in 2018–19. DVA also met targets for the number of rehabilitation assessments made within 30 days of referral (program 2.6.1). Performance on this metric has improved compared with 2018–19.

In 2019–20 DVA fell short of the target for the number of rehabilitation clients who have met or exceeded their rehabilitation goals (program 2.6.2). This represents a downward shift compared with 2018–19. There are a number of possible reasons why a client's rehabilitation goals may not have been met—for example, clients may cease to participate in rehabilitation prematurely due to a change in their health; and there may be data entry issues with the goal attainment information. In the first half of 2020 we undertook significant work to engage with DVA's rehabilitation providers about goal setting and scoring using the Goal Attainment Scale.

Client satisfaction (program 2.6.3) is calculated through a survey of clients who have completed the rehabilitation program. We use the information captured by the survey to identify and pursue opportunities for targeted business improvements and as an evidence base to inform program reform in the future. Survey questions were revised throughout 2019–20 to provide DVA with a more comprehensive understanding of the client experience of the rehabilitation program. Due to the change in survey questions throughout 2019–20 DVA was unable to use the methodology for calculating the 2018–19 metric. To calculate performance measure 2.6.3 across the changing survey questions, a simplified methodology was used. Owing to the significant difference in calculation methodology, any variation in results from 2018–19 to 2019–20 cannot be interpreted as a trend in changes to overall client satisfaction with the DVA Rehabilitation program.

Achievements in 2019–20

Early Engagement Model

DVA and the Department of Defence continue to work together to ensure transitioning ADF members are registered with DVA, enabling us to proactively engage with veterans and provide faster, tailored support as needed.

Mental and social health initiatives

In 2019–20 DVA delivered on a range of mental and social health initiatives to enhance the wellbeing of veterans and their families. Access to early health treatment and support was expanded under programs 2.1 and 2.2 through implementation of the following activities:

- health checks for veterans every year for five years after service
- preparation of health assessment materials to support veterans affected by anti-malarial medication
- completion of mental health pilots to improve outcomes for vulnerable veterans through coordinated care.

Under program 2.5, DVA promoted wellbeing through the following social support and connection activities:

- delivery of trauma recovery programs in hospitals
- progressing a research trial of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) assistance dogs
- providing targeted support for children of veterans through Kookaburra Kids.

We enhanced community involvement, health literacy and participation through a range of social health programs, including:

- Heart Health
- Veterans' Health Week
- Health and Wellbeing funding
- Men's Health Peer Education.

To assist clinicians to better meet veterans' mental health needs, DVA provided mental health online training and practitioner support through the Centenary of Anzac Centre.

Post-traumatic stress disorder assistance dogs

DVA is working with La Trobe University to trial psychiatric assistance dogs as an adjunct to evidence-based treatment for veterans with PTSD. The trial commenced in mid-2018 and is expected to run until June 2022.

During 2019–20, a total of 20 veteran participants were recruited to join the trial. The first seven veterans progressed through the initial phases of training and had received their assistance dogs by May 2020. The remaining dogs will be handed over by the end of 2020.

The trial has remained on schedule despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants began reporting improvements in their general health and wellbeing immediately after receiving their dogs.

An independent evaluation of the trial is being conducted in parallel to contribute to the international evidence base on the use of assistance dogs as an adjunct to clinical therapy for veterans with PTSD.

In September 2019, DVA also launched the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program to assist veterans who are suffering with PTSD while La Trobe University is conducting its four-year trial. The program has been incredibly positive, with close to 100 veterans assessed as eligible to receive an assistance dog and five dogs matched with veterans by the end of the financial year.

The psychiatric assistance dog is quite different from other types of assistance animals. The dogs are specifically trained to perform tasks that contribute to the management of a veteran's PTSD. A task is a trained behaviour that alleviates post-traumatic stress symptoms by doing something the veteran cannot do themselves but is required for them to reach their clinical recovery goals—for example, waking them up if they are experiencing distress in their sleep, or nuzzling to distract from emotionally disabling symptoms.

The program is expected to grow in 2020–21, with plans in place to expand the existing panel of contracted providers to ensure national coverage. An open market request for tender was released in November 2019; the outcome of this process is expected to be announced in August 2020.

Assistance for veterans prescribed anti-malarial medications

In December 2019 we engaged health care company Bupa to deliver a national program to veterans who are concerned about the effect on their health of having taken the anti-malarial medications mefloquine and tafenoquine. The program will deliver a comprehensive health assessment and provide a health support recommendation report that includes recommended clinical and diagnostic testing and appropriate treatment pathways for coordination by the veteran's general practitioner (GP).

DVA and Bupa are developing the program and assessment materials in consultation with clinicians and the veteran community. The first health assessments are expected to be available by the end of 2020.

Veteran Health Check

The Veteran Health Check enables veterans to access a comprehensive health assessment with a GP to identify ways to optimise their physical and mental health and wellbeing. It was introduced on 1 July 2019.

Early intervention and appropriate referrals can help veterans to enjoy better health outcomes and manage their health during their transition to civilian life. There are two types of Veteran Health Checks available:

- One-off Veteran Health Check—available to all former serving ADF members who left the ADF before 30 June 2019
- Annual Veteran Health Check—available each year for the first five years for veterans who transitioned from the ADF after 1 July 2019.

Suicide prevention pilots

In 2019–20 DVA completed two suicide prevention pilots—the Coordinated Veterans' Care (CVC) Mental Health Pilot and the Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot. The pilots were announced in the 2017–18 Budget.

The CVC Mental Health Pilot tested whether the use of a digital coaching app can promote better health outcomes for veterans in conjunction with traditional treatment through a GP. The pilot primarily targeted veterans in rural and remote regions where mental health services can be difficult to access or are limited or unavailable. The pilot commenced in August 2018 and was completed by 31 December 2019. A total of 184 veterans participated.

The Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot was an adaptation of Beyond Blue's The Way Back Support Service. The pilot tested the benefits of providing intensive, wraparound support and non-clinical management services to address an ex-serving ADF member's mental and social health needs on discharge from hospital. It included referrals for veterans who had attempted suicide or had experienced suicidal ideation; and those who had a mental health condition and had been clinically assessed as being at an increased risk of suicide. The pilot provided 90 days of support (or longer if required) after hospital discharge. The pilot commenced in July 2018 and ended on 30 June 2020. A total of 109 veterans participated.

An independent evaluation of each pilot is underway and scheduled for completion in late 2020. Findings and outcomes from the pilots will be used to inform the design and implementation of DVA's future mental health and suicide prevention policy, programs and services.

Trauma Recovery Programs

Trauma Recovery Programs for PTSD (TRP-PTSD) provide holistic, time-limited and evidence-informed treatment for veterans and current ADF members who are living with PTSD and other comorbidities, in order to support psychological growth and recovery. DVA has funded TRP-PTSD in public and private hospitals across Australia since 1996. There are currently 17 contracted TRP-PTSD providers, including 15 private hospitals and two public hospitals.

In 2019–20, 170 veterans and 47 current ADF members participated in TRP-PTSD at 12 hospitals nationally. In April 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DVA approved the temporary delivery of mental health and rehabilitation day programs through telehealth arrangements where clinically appropriate. Some TRP-PTSD providers chose to take advantage of this approach, as it allowed for minimal disruption to these valuable services.

Mental health webinars

DVA's professional development webinar series 'Mental Health and the Military Experience' supported practitioners to better respond to the mental health needs of veterans. It completed in April 2020. The series was successful in engaging with health professionals who treat veterans and those who are interested in veteran mental health. Over 13,800 health professionals attended the 15-part webinar series.

The webinars covered topics such as identity during/after transition, treating PTSD, managing comorbid mental health conditions, pain, research, and suicide prevention and safety planning.

Information about the webinars and how to access them is provided on the Open Arms website.

Heart Health Program

DVA continued to provide the Heart Health Program, under which veterans and peacekeepers with operational service overseas can access a one-off, 52-week gym-based exercise and health education program. It is provided on behalf of DVA by Corporate Health Management.

In 2019–20, group and individual programs were held in several states and territories. Because of the restrictions introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, DVA supported telephonic health coaching so that interested group participants could continue the program.

Veterans' Health Week

Veterans' Health Week aims to highlight the importance of good mental health and raise awareness of health and wellbeing generally in the veteran and Defence community.

DVA provides funding, support and/or event promotion to ex-service organisations and community groups to run relevant, local events that encourage veterans and their families to take care of their health.

In October 2019, more than 270 registered events were held across Australia for veterans, current serving personnel and their families with the theme of 'Mental Wellness'. Events included golf days, group walking events, presentations about mental wellness, and workshops to help with stress management. The number of events held this year was more than double that of 2018.

Open Arms—Veterans & Families Counselling

Open Arms strives to meet its mission—to excel in the provision of nationally consistent yet locally responsive, evidence-based mental health and wellbeing support services to veterans and their families. Over the past year, Open Arms' key achievements include improved services to better support the mental health and wellbeing of the veteran community.

National Community and Peer Program

The Community and Peer Program provides clients with access to veteran and family Community and Peer Advisors (Peers) who have a lived experience of mental health issues, recovery and military service. Peers connect with veterans and their families, providing a bridge to clinical services. They engage with clients to identify and assist individuals who are in need of services, improving mental health outcomes for those at risk of suicide and those with complex support needs.

The program was implemented nationally in July 2019, and there are now a total of 40 Peers working in Open Arms centres across Australia. Through the work of Peers, Open Arms can connect with individuals in need and expand our reach in the local community. The program has received an overwhelmingly positive response from the veteran community.

Safe Zone—anonymous counselling

Safe Zone Support is a free and anonymous counselling line that is available 24/7 for current and former members of the ADF and their families. DVA launched the service in April 2020 in response to emerging issues in the veteran community. Safe Zone Support provides access to specialised counsellors with an understanding of military culture and experience. The service offers care without the need for individuals to identify themselves or be concerned that their call will be recorded.

Mental health support during the black summer bushfires and COVID-19

In 2019–20 DVA implemented a number of initiatives to ensure that veterans and their families had several alternative ways to access support during the black summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic. For example, we:

- introduced a secure mental health telephone and video counselling platform
- accelerated the commencement of 24/7 Client Assist operation, which ensures that consistent crisis support is available at any time
- developed and implemented the online group treatment programs Doing Anger Differently, Understanding Anxiety, Recovery from Trauma and Managing Pain
- released the online training program Suicide Prevention Start.

Also, all Open Arms clinicians were given online training to implement the SafeSide Suicide Risk Prevention Framework. The framework is used to prioritise problem solving with clients at risk of suicide to mitigate risk factors. This training assisted clinicians to create a future focus and enhance safety planning at a time when many clients were vulnerable.

Trauma-focused innovation and support

DVA works closely with the Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, an internationally recognised leader in trauma-related mental health and wellbeing. This relationship allows us to leverage our expertise to support clients, particularly those with trauma-related mental health conditions. Phoenix Australia supports Open Arms clinicians by facilitating monthly sessions about the application of trauma-focused interventions with clients who present with PTSD symptoms.

Open Arms is currently working with Defence and Phoenix Australia on two trials with a trauma focus: the Rapid Exposure Supporting Trauma Recovery (RESTORE) Trial and the Moral Injury Outcomes Scale (MIOS).

The RESTORE Trial is investigating whether the intensive delivery of prolonged exposure (PE) therapy will deliver comparable outcomes to the gold standard PE therapy treatment. If proven effective, it will increase the accessibility of trauma-related treatment for veterans.

MIOS explores the mental health outcomes associated with a potentially morally injurious event and the development of a validated international military moral injury and outcome measure. If this outcome measure proves to be successful, it will be utilised as part of routine mental health assessment and treatment. MIOS is an international research collaboration with Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Summary

In 2019–20 DVA initiatives enhanced the wellbeing of veterans and their families by successfully connecting many veterans to the quality, evidence-based services and supports they need, at the time they need them most.

We achieved a significant increase in client satisfaction from last year, continued to expand a range of medicines listed on the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and conducted a wide range of mental and social health initiatives that support the wellbeing of our clients.

DVA remains committed to ensuring that clients have timely access to high-quality health care, counselling and rehabilitation services; and to maintaining and developing services that support a level of independence. DVA continues to review and improve business practices to ensure that programs are delivered efficiently and effectively.

Understand and respect

Support the wellbeing of those who serve or have served in the defence of our nation, and their families, by providing and maintaining war graves and delivering meaningful commemorative activities to promote community recognition and understanding of the service and sacrifice of veterans.

Outcome 3

Acknowledgement and commemoration of those who served Australia and its allies in wars, conflicts and peace operations through promoting recognition of service and sacrifice, preservation of Australia's wartime heritage, and official commemorations.

Key performance results

The success of our work under outcome 3 is measured by our achievements in two categories: war graves and commemorations.

Our PBS and corporate plan set out performance measures and targets for each program under outcome 3. Table 5 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2019–20.

Table 5: Outcome 3 performance measures and results

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018-19 Actual result	2019-20 Actual result	Achieved
Program 3.1: Provide and maintain war graves				PBS p 60, CP p 24	
3.1.1	The condition of war graves that are the primary place of official commemoration and sites of collective official commemoration that are maintained by OAWG meets CWGC standards ¹	Complaints received relate to 10 or less graves or sites of collective commemoration	Achieved	Achieved	✓
Program 3.2: Deliver commemorative activities				PBS p 61, CP p 24	
3.2.1	Events are delivered safely, on schedule and within budget	The number of safety incidents reported is less than 1% of those attendance 100% of events are delivered on time and with less than a 5% variation in actual expenditure compared to budget	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported ²		
3.2.2	Government is satisfied with quality ¹	The Minister for Veterans' Affairs confirms the Government's satisfaction with the quality of each event	Achieved	Achieved	✓

CP = Corporate Plan 2019–2023; CWGC = Commonwealth War Graves Commission; OAWG = Office of Australian War Graves; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20

¹ These measures have been replaced in 2020–21 with quantitative measures which ensure war graves are maintained in accordance with standards; and commemorative activities are appropriate and engage with a broad audience.

² This measure has been removed as a result of the review of DVA's performance measures. For further information refer to page 29.

Table 6: Outcome 3 performance criterion categories

Performance criterion category	Performance criterion number
War graves	3.1.1
Commemorations	3.2.2

Analysis of performance against outcome 3

Office of Australian War Graves

The Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) is the agent of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). The OAWG manages 76 war cemeteries and war plots commemorating our war dead in Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The OAWG also cares for the more than 324,000 other final resting places of post-war dead, and other eligible veterans of wars, conflicts, peace and other operations to which Australia has been committed, in over 2,330 locations.

The OAWG welcomes feedback on the standards of maintenance and presentation of war cemeteries, graves, official commemoration plaques and monuments. In 2019–20, the OAWG received three complaints about the standard of an official commemoration; these issues were rectified as a priority. This is a pleasing result considering the large number of commemorative assets the OAWG maintains. The OAWG regularly receives acknowledgement and compliments from veterans, their families and the broader Australian community about the high standards of commemorations maintenance.

More than two million Australians have served in our defence forces since federation, although not all Australian veterans are eligible for an official commemoration. In 2019–20, an additional 2,122 eligible veterans received an official commemoration.

Despite experiencing significant delays to routine inspections and maintenance due to devastating bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, operations of the OAWG were well managed and standards maintained. The OAWG was also able to deliver two key renovation projects at the Goulburn War Cemetery and at the Rookwood Cemetery in Sydney.

The CWGC's Goulburn War Cemetery contains nine Commonwealth burials of Australian service personnel from the First World War and 32 from the Second World War. They are among the 13,000 Australians who served in the two world wars who died and are at rest at home in Australia. The redevelopment involved consultation with the local sub-branch of the Returned and Services League (RSL), and the work was completed by OAWG staff and local contractors in late 2019.

The Old Army Anglican Section 'EE' at the Rookwood Necropolis is a heritage-listed site containing the graves and memorials of 112 Australian service personnel from Australia and the Cook Islands. Established in 1888, the Old Army section represents a microcosm of Australia's military and social history from colonial times to the Vietnam War. The refurbishment includes new stone walls, plaques, seating, interpretative and wayfinding signage, garden beds, irrigation and turf. The works were completed in time for Anzac Day 2020 and are a tribute to the partnerships between OAWG, the Rookwood General Cemetery, family and friends, and a dedicated cohort of Vietnam veterans, particularly members of the Kirribilli sub-branch of the RSL.

Commemorations

In 2019–20 commemorative services were successfully conducted for:

- the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Hai (Operation Hammersley) at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra
- the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (Operation TAMAR) at the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra.

International Anzac Day services

In 2019–20 overseas Anzac Day ceremonies in Gallipoli, Turkey; Villers-Bretonneux, France; Hellfire Pass, Thailand; and Sandakan Memorial Park, Malaysia, were not held due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Australians were encouraged to mark Anzac Day at home by watching a televised national service from the Australian War Memorial.

The Anzac Portal is DVA's perpetual digital commemorative presence. In 2019–20 DVA continued to refresh the content on the Anzac Portal; new First World War content was progressively uploaded over the year, and new content for the Second World War and later wars and conflicts will be progressively added over 2020–21. The Anzac Portal played an important role on Anzac Day 2020, when commemorative services were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. The resources on the portal, including draft orders of service, commemorative music and poetry, posters and books, assisted the community to commemorate at home.

DVA also conducted two regular mail-outs for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. The mail-outs provided educational resources for students and teachers, historical posters and books, and engaging digital products to tell the stories of veterans' service. They went to over 17,000 stakeholders around Australia, including schools, libraries, RSLs and other ex-service organisations, aged care facilities, and parliamentary representatives.

DVA will continue to deliver program activities that enhance the community's awareness and recognition of service and sacrifice and the preservation of Australia's wartime heritage.

Achievements in 2019–20

Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant increases recognition of veterans

The nationally recognised Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant was established following the passage of legislation on 31 October 2019. Under the Veterans' Covenant, veterans can apply for a Veterans' Recognition Package and Veteran Benefits Program.

The Veterans' Recognition Package gives eligible veterans a new Veteran Card, an Australian Veteran Lapel Pin or Reservist Lapel Pin, and a copy of the Covenant Oath. The cards and lapel pins give the opportunity for the public to acknowledge the contribution that veterans have made to Australia and for our veterans to connect with the broader Australian community. The package was launched on 3 November 2019. Since then we have distributed 95,844 Veterans' Recognition Packages with Veteran Lapel Pins and 2,349 with Reserve Lapel Pins to applicants. The automated online application process has contributed significantly to the ease with which veterans can access the Veteran Card. The uptake of Veterans' Recognition Packages has resulted in around one-fifth of applicants making contact with DVA for the first time.

*We, the people of Australia, respect and give thanks
to all who have served in our defence force and their families.*

*We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice
demanded of all who commit to defend our nation.*

*We undertake to preserve the memory and deeds of all who have served
and promise to welcome, embrace, and support
all military veterans as respected and valued members of our community.*

For what they have done, this we will do.

The Veteran Benefits Program offers eligible veterans and their families a free web-based subscription service for access to discounts and offers from businesses throughout Australia. These discounts and offers from over 800 organisations, including large national retailers, are a tangible way in which the community can thank veterans for their service. In 2019–20, 63,200 Veteran Card holders accessed the Veteran Benefits Program, and the number of organisations involved continues to increase. DVA is continuing to expand the program through a service delivery partnership, advertising on targeted media and social media channels, and communication with the ex-service community and local peak bodies. More information is available at www.recognition.dva.gov.au/veteran-card.

The introduction of the Veterans' Recognition Package and Veteran Benefits Program were key achievements for DVA in 2019–20. DVA will consider how best to measure the performance of these programs in the future and will look to introduce performance measures in the 2021–22 PBS.

Preservation of war graves and memorials

In addition to the care of official commemorations in cemeteries and gardens of remembrance throughout Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, OAWG is also responsible for the care and maintenance of 40 official Australian memorials in 16 different overseas nations and the operation of three interpretive sites in France, Thailand and Malaysia. The presentation and structural integrity of the commemorative memorials and sites were maintained at a high standard throughout the year and were not significantly impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the pandemic and enforced in-country restrictions from March 2020, OAWG safely managed the closure of the Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre in Thailand; the Sandakan Memorial Park in Malaysia; and the Sir John Monash Centre in France. With the implementation of appropriate social distancing and hygiene measures, the Sir John Monash Centre and the Sandakan Memorial Park were safely reopened in June 2020.

In 2019–20, OAWG completed the Government's election commitment to undertake a scoping study for a commemorative site on the Greek island of Lemnos. Lemnos was a key location for the Allies during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, particularly for the provision of medical treatment and recuperation. The report will be provided for government consideration in 2020–21.

OAWG has also re-energised its social media engagements, seeking to educate and inform a broader audience regarding commemorations, commemorative events, significant anniversaries, veterans' stories and all aspects of service and sacrifice.

Summary

DVA, through the OAWG, continued to meet the high standards that the Australian community and the CWGC expect for the care and maintenance of official commemorations and memorials in Australia and overseas. OAWG staff, field teams, contractors and other partners are to be commended for their achievements in the past year, particularly during a challenging period that included devastating bushfires in Australia and a global pandemic.

We continued to support community engagement by providing grants to community organisations for commemoration and through online and hard-copy products and resources. This has enabled opportunities for poignant, solemn and individual reflections in COVID-safe environments.

The Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant recognises and acknowledges the unique nature of military service and the contribution of veterans and their families. The Veteran Card, lapel pins and Oath allow all Australians to identify veterans when they are not in uniform or wearing their medals and offer respect to them and their families. The Covenant also provides a framework that enables veterans and their families to better connect with their community.

Policy

Providing strategic and evidence-based policy advice to government.

Removal of activity and measures

As discussed on page 29, following a review of our corporate plan we made improvements to our purpose and key activities to provide a clearer alignment to our purpose. As a result of this review we removed our policy key activity from our Corporate Plan 2020–21 and the reporting against the corresponding performance measures below. Table 7 shows our targets as stated in the Corporate Plan 2019–23.

Table 7: Policy performance measures

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
A3.1: Develop and provide strategic base policy advice					CP p 25
A3.1.1	DVA publishes a Strategic Intent articulating how it will support the wellbeing of veterans and their families	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
A3.2.1	DVA provides evidence-based policy advice based on a well-defined approach that supports the Strategic Intent	50% 2019–20 ^{1,2} 75% 2020–21 ^{1,2} 95% 2021–22 ² 95% 2022–23 ²	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
A3.3.1	Assessment by the Minister's office that policy advice received is grounded either in contemporary evidence and/or, emerging research and/or, cognisant of community expectations, and aligned to the Strategic Intent	Medium-High 2019–20 Medium-High 2020–21 Medium-High 2021–22 High 2022–23	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
A3.2: Undertake a program of strategic research					CP p 25
A3.2	Alignment of research activities with the Strategic Research Framework (SRF) principles and priorities	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		

CP = Corporate Plan 2019–2023; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20

¹ First two years' targets remain at lower level while DVA embeds this new process and approach.

² Percentage of policy advice that is grounded either in contemporary evidence and/or emerging research and/or cognisant of community expectations, and aligned to the Strategic Intent.

Enabling services

Facilitate the delivery of services to business lines through innovative, seamless, efficient and effective use of resources to support organisational capability.

Removal of activity and measures

As discussed on page 29, following a review of our corporate plan we made improvements to our purpose and key activities to provide a clearer alignment to our purpose. As a result of this review we removed our enabling services key activity in our Corporate Plan 2020–21 and the reporting against the corresponding performance measures below. Table 8 shows our targets as stated in the Corporate Plan 2019–23.

Table 8: Enabling services performance measures

No	Performance criterion	Target	2018–19 Actual result	2019–20 Actual result	Achieved
E4.1: Provide a professional, engaged and flexible workforce					CP p 27
4.1.1	APS workforce is affordable and within budget	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.1.2	Workforce Strategy is in place and reviewed regularly to meet operational requirements ¹	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.1.3	Workforce is engaged and actively participates with attendance rates consistent with like APS agencies	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.1.4	Workforce actively participates in Performance Agreements under the Performance Feedback Scheme	>90%	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
E4.2: Deliver sound financial management					CP p 27
4.2.1	The Financial Strategy is in place and it is reviewed and updated regularly	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.2.2	Unqualified financial statements	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.2.3	Continue to monitor the financial performance of the department to ensure sustainability	Achieved	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
E4.3: Provide reliable, responsive, accessible and cost effective digital services					CP p 28
4.3.1	Percentage of claims lodged through DVA's digital channel MyService	60% 2019–20 70% 2020–21 75% 2021–22 78% 2022–23	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.3.2	Client satisfaction with MyService	82% 2019–20 84% 2020–21 86% 2021–22 88% 2022–23	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		
4.3.3	ICT platform availability	>98%	This measure has been removed and will no longer be reported		

APS = Australian Public Service; CP = Corporate Plan 2019–2023; ICT = information and communications technology;

PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20; .

¹ The Workforce Strategy is scheduled to be reviewed as a minimum every 18 months.