

Audit report of the 2020-21 annual
performance statement

Department of Veterans' Affairs



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Auditor-General for Australia



Attachment C

Independent assurance report on the annual performance statements of the Department of Veterans' Affairs

To the Minister for Finance

Qualified Conclusion

I have undertaken a reasonable assurance engagement of the attached 2020–21 Annual Performance Statements of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Entity).

In my opinion, except for the possible effects of the matters described in the Bases for Qualified Conclusion section of my report, the attached 2020–21 Annual Performance Statements of the Entity 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).

Bases for Qualified Conclusion

Performance measure 1.5.4 Quality (Achieving the Scheme's Outcomes)

The Entity's records in respect of the result reported against performance measure 1.5.4 'Quality (Achieving the Schemes' Outcomes)' were incomplete. The Entity has reported performance on the 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 result reported against this measure was accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records. As a result, I was not able to conclude whether the reporting of the Entity's annual performance statements with respect to this measure complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act.

Performance measure 2.5.6 Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability

The result reported against performance measure 2.5.6 'Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability' is based upon third-party records. I was unable to obtain evidence from the Entity that it had appropriate controls to assure the reliability of the underlying systems 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 records. Accordingly, I was unable to conclude whether the result reported against this measure was accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records. As a result, I was not able to conclude whether the reporting of the Entity'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 Entity's annual performance statements complied with Division 3 of Part 2-3 of the Act, including providing information about the Entity's performance in achieving its purposes, I applied the following criteria:

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- whether the annual performance statements complied with Division 2 of Part 2-3 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 (the Rule);
- whether the performance measures presented in the annual performance statements were appropriate;
- whether the Entity 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 measures in the annual performance statements were accurate and complete, and supported by appropriate records.

Accountable Authority's responsibilities

As the Accountable Authority of the Entity, the Secretary is responsible under the Act for:

- the preparation and fair presentation of annual performance statements that accurately reflect the Entity's performance and are free from material misstatement, and
- keeping records about the Entity's performance in accordance with requirements prescribed by the Rule.

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 measures and accompanying results presented in the annual performance statements of the Entity accurately reflect the Entity's performance in achieving its purpose and comply, in all material respects, with the Act and the Rule.

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.

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

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 Act and the Rule 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Hehir'.

Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

Canberra
9 December 2021

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 2020–21 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 2020–21 Annual Performance Statements of the Entity. 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 sections 16E, 16EA and 16F of the Rule.

Appropriateness

Whether the performance measures presented in the Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plan and annual performance statements were appropriate. In considering appropriateness, the most important aspects were whether the performance measures, individually and collectively, met the requirements of section 16EA of the Rule, being that they:

- (a) relate directly to one or more of those purposes or key activities;
- (b) use sources of information and methodologies that are reliable and verifiable;
- (c) provide an unbiased basis for the measurement and assessment of the entity's performance;
- (d) where reasonably practicable, comprise a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures;
- (e) include measures of the entity's outputs, efficiency and effectiveness if those things are appropriate measures of the entity's performance; and
- (f) provide a basis for an assessment of the entity's performance over time.

I also considered whether the performance measures specified targets for each of those performance measures for which it is reasonably practicable to set a target as required by section 16E of the Rule.

Supporting frameworks

Whether the Entity 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 Entity 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 2020–21 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 Bases for Qualified Conclusion section above.

Are the performance measures presented in the Entity's Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plan and 2020–21 annual performance statements appropriate?

The ANAO reviewed the performance measures that are output, efficiency or effectiveness measures as meeting the threshold for reporting on the achievement of the Entity's purposes or key activities. All performance measures that met the threshold were considered to be of equal importance in measuring the achievement of the entity's purposes or key activities.

The performance measures and relevant performance information in the 2020–21 Annual Performance Statements were assessed as appropriate to measure the achievement of the Entity's purposes or key activities.

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

The ANAO examined the Entity'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 2020–21 Annual Performance Statements. The supporting framework was assessed as effective with the exception of the matters outlined in the Basis for Qualified Conclusion section above.

Are the results reported by the Entity 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 measures in the annual performance statements for completeness and accuracy. The results of performance measures were mostly complete and accurate and supported by appropriate records with the exception of the matters outlined above in the Bases for Qualified Conclusion section above.

Annual Reports

2020–21

Repatriation Commission

Military Rehabilitation and
Compensation Commission

Department of Veterans' Affairs



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

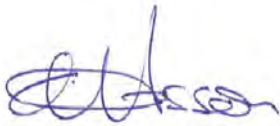
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Annual performance statements

Statement by the accountable authority

I, as the accountable authority of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, present the 2020–21 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

6 October 2021

Overview of our purpose, outcomes, programs and activities

The annual performance statements present our achievements against the outcomes, key activities, programs, performance measures and targets set out in the DVA Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21 (PBS) and the Corporate Plan 2020–21.

We regularly review 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 information that appears in the PBS.

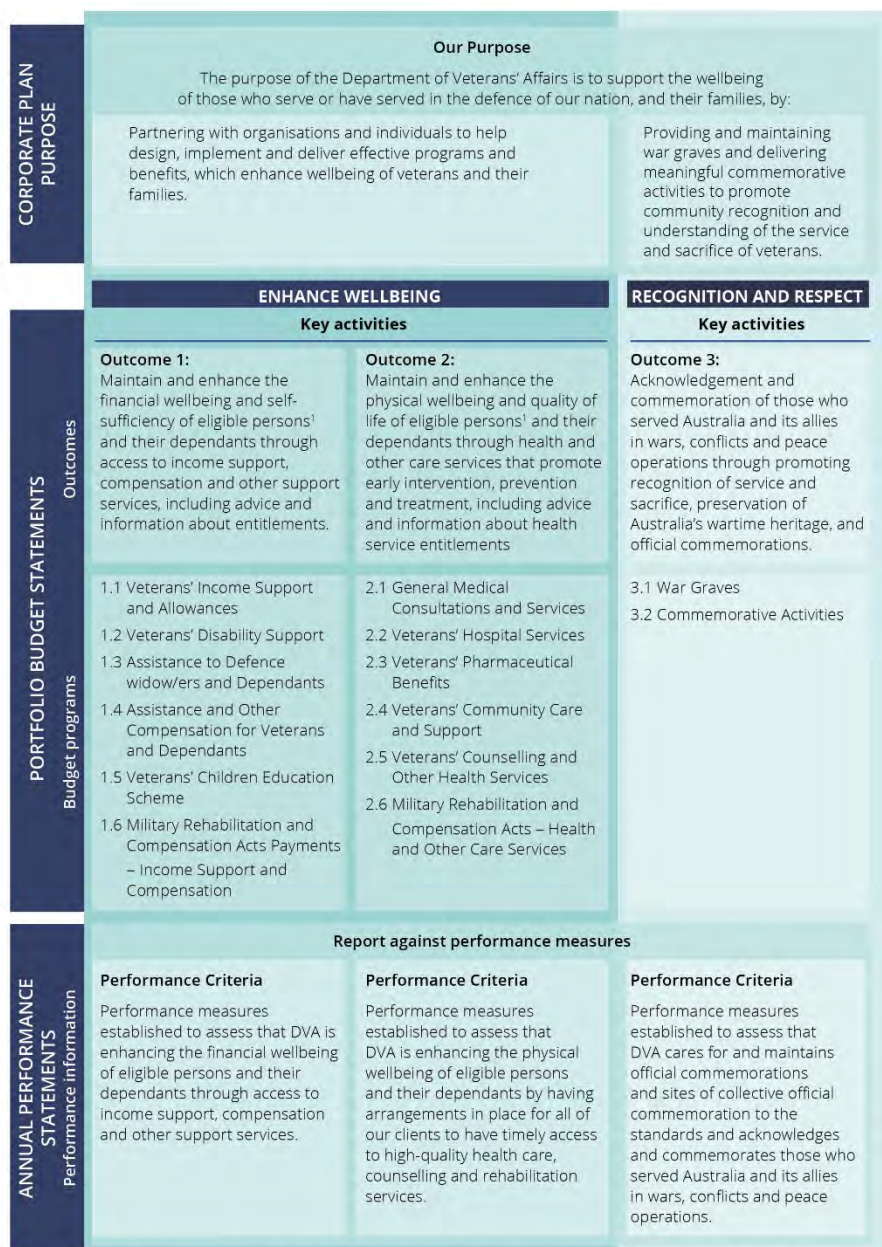
In 2020–21 DVA pursued its purpose and key activities by implementing appropriate budget programs that deliver our 3 outcomes on behalf of the Australian Government.

Changes to DVA's performance measures

During 2020–21 DVA undertook a review of its Corporate Plan 2020–21 and performance measures. Areas of improvement were identified for DVA's purpose, key activities and performance measures. As a result, DVA reissued the corporate plan in June 2021, which included a number of minor changes to the measures and an additional table to help explain the relationship between DVA's purpose and performance measures.

These changes were important to provide a clear link between purposes and the measures that will be used to assess 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



* The figure is modified to show the alignment between purposes, key activities, outcomes and programs.

¹ An eligible person as defined by the relevant legislation

Our key activities as identified in our corporate plan (pages 17 and 25) are listed below. Further details on how the key activities were performed can be found under ‘Key performance results’ for each outcome by referring to the relevant budget programs:

- Work with Defence to provide a seamless and positive transition for veterans and their families to civilian life with a focus on training, employment, physical health and mental wellbeing. (PBS budget programs 2.5 and 2.6)
- Administer the Strategic Research Framework and drive a program of applied research focusing on the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families, supporting a data-driven approach to policy development, service delivery and decision-making. (PBS budget program 2.5)
- Make arrangements with medical, dental and allied health providers throughout Australia to ensure veterans and their families have access to a comprehensive range of services. (PBS budget programs 2.1 and 2.2)
- Make it easier for veterans and their families to access the right information, services and support by continuing to improve and enhance systems and processes delivered by the Veteran Centric Reform – Putting Veterans and their Families First Program. (PBS budget programs 1.1 to 2.6)
- Establish a national network of Veteran Wellbeing Centres by 2022 which deliver integrated support to veterans and their families from government, business and community partnerships. (PBS budget program 2.4)
- Provide grants to support a variety of wellbeing initiatives, including those that support veterans’ social support and connection to the wider community. (PBS budget program 2.5)
- Provide income and financial support and compensation payments to eligible veterans and their families. (PBS budget programs 1.1 to 1.6)
- Provide veterans and their families with access to mental health care services, including primary prevention through counselling and care coordination for people with complex needs. (PBS budget program 2.5)
- Enable veterans and their families to access support for housing assistance via Defence Service Homes Insurance. (PBS budget program 1.4)
- Implement a Provider Engagement Framework to improve our engagement and communication activities with DVA’s health providers, enabling them to deliver effective programs that enhance the wellbeing of veterans and their families. (PBS budget program 2.6)
- Provide veterans and their families with access to education and skills development. (PBS budget program 1.5)
- Provide and maintain war cemeteries, war plots, gardens of remembrance, memorials to the missing and other individual official commemorations for those eligible veterans who have died as a result of their service to Australia in wars, conflicts and peace operations. (PBS budget program 3.1)

- Maintain official national memorials overseas and operate interpretive centres in France, Thailand and Malaysia. (PBS budget program 3.1)
- Continue to recognise and acknowledge the contribution of veterans and their families through the distribution of the Veterans' Covenant: oath, lapel pin and discount card (promoting access to a range of benefits from participating businesses). (PBS budget program 3.2)
- Deliver commemorative events to enable the community to better understand, acknowledge and commemorate the service and sacrifice of those who have served Australia in wars, conflicts and peace operations. (PBS budget program 3.2)
- Develop and distribute educational resources and information to promote an increased understanding of Australia's wartime history. (PBS budget program 3.2)

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 2020–21, noting the changes to DVA's performance measures discussed above. 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
- efficiency.

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 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 and incorporated in the staff training and development schedule. 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 selected at random or a census of all clients within a program. The survey has a confidence interval of 95%. Over 12,000 clients were surveyed in 2020–21 through an online survey.²

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.

Efficiency

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. While we continue to investigate ways to measure efficiency and develop formal efficiency measures, DVA will continue to use timeliness measures as proxies to measure efficiency. These timeliness measures can give an indication of efficiency over time.

² 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.

Overview of performance

In 2020–21, DVA initiatives enhanced the physical and financial wellbeing of veterans and their families. We connected veterans to quality and responsive services and support when they needed them most.

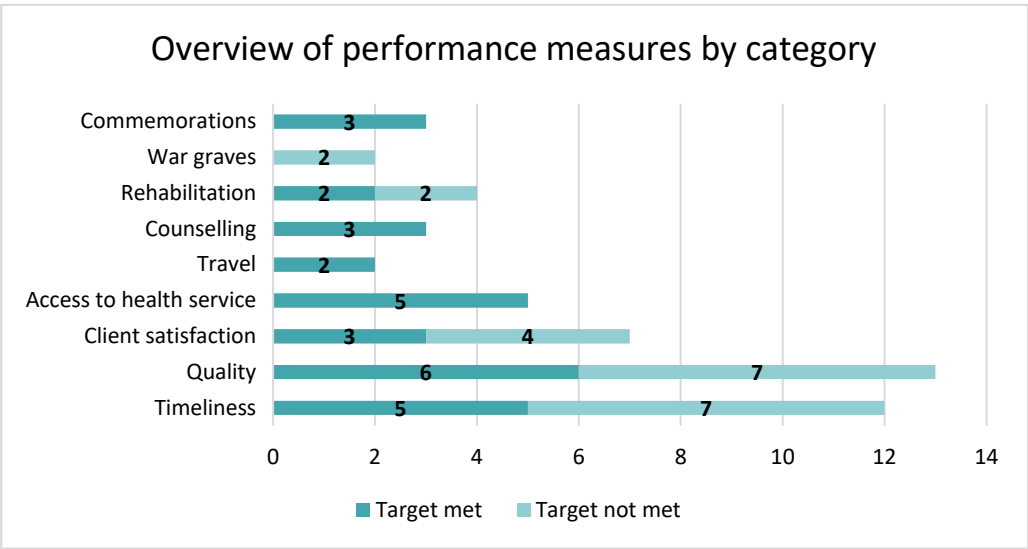
DVA successfully delivered all 3 outcomes across our purpose and key activities. We achieved 29 of our performance measures reported in these statements, while 22 measures were not achieved.

Of the 22 performance measures that did not meet their target, 18 related to Outcome 1, 2 related to Outcome 2, and 2 related to Outcome 3. However, it should be noted there were 8 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 (7) and quality measures (7). While we did make progress in improving claims processing and, subsequently, improved outcomes for veterans and their families, significant increases in the number of claims received impacted on our ability to meet timeliness targets for many of these claim types. We are committed to reducing these time frames, and the increase in the department's budget for the 2021–22 financial year coupled with an increase to the department's average staffing level will provide more capacity to do this.

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, the 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 across our purposes of 'Enhance wellbeing' and 'Recognition and respect'.

FIGURE 4: PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT, 2020–21



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 3 categories: timeliness, quality and client satisfaction.

Our PBS and the Corporate Plan 2020–21 set out performance measures and targets for each program under Outcome 1. Table 1 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2020–21.

TABLE 1: OUTCOME 1 PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND RESULTS

No	Performance criterion	Target	2019–20 Actual result	2020–21 Actual result	Achieved
Program 1.1: Deliver veterans' income support and allowances				PBS p 33, CP p 18	
1.1.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of new claims processed within 30 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	80%	76%	No
1.1.1.2	Timeliness: The percentage of pensioner-initiated reviews (PIRs) processed within 10 days ^{1, 2}	Percentage increase over previous year	49%	59%	Yes
1.1.2	Quality: Correctness rate	New claims: >95%	98%	99%	Yes
		PIRs: >95%	99%	98%	Yes
1.1.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ³	80%	66%	67%	No
Program 1.2: Deliver veterans' disability support				PBS p 34, CP p 18	
1.2.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 100 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	34%	24%	No
1.2.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	91%	94%	No

1.2.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ³	80%	67%	61%	No
Program 1.3: Deliver assistance to Defence widow/ers and dependants				PBS p 35, CP p 18	
1.3.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 30 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	51%	51%	No
1.3.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	93%	92%	No
1.3.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ³	80%	88%	82%	Yes
Program 1.4: Deliver assistance and other compensation for veterans and dependants				PBS p 36, CP p 19	
Funeral benefits					
1.4.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 10 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	84%	79%	No
1.4.1.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	98%	100%	Yes
1.4.1.3	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ³	80%	91% ⁴	89%	Yes
Defence Service Homes Insurance					
1.4.2	Policyholder satisfaction: The percentage of policyholders satisfied with the service provided when their claim for damage to their home has been finalised ^{5, 6}	>90%	n/a	90% ⁷	No
Program 1.5: Deliver the Veterans’ Children Education Scheme				PBS p 37, CP p 19	
1.5.1	Timeliness: The percentage of claims processed within 28 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	54%	49%	No
1.5.2	Quality: Correctness rate	>95%	96%	100%	Yes

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 ⁸	>75%	88%	83%	Yes
1.5.4	Quality (achieving the Schemes' outcomes): Percentage of students progressing through each level of their education or career training ⁹	>85%	99%	99%	Yes
Program 1.6: Deliver income support and compensation under MRCA and DRCA				PBS pp 38–39, CP p 20	
1.6.1.1	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA liability claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	28%	17%	No
1.6.1.2	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA permanent impairment (PI) claims processed (determined) within 100 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	24%	32%	Yes
1.6.1.3	Timeliness: The percentage of DRCA incapacity claims processed (determined) within 50 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	63%	68%	Yes
1.6.2	Quality: Correctness rate of DRCA claims				
	- DRCA liability claims	>95%	93%	89%	No
	- DRCA permanent impairment claims	>95%	90%	93%	No
	- DRCA incapacity claims	>95%	90%	88%	No
1.6.3.1	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA liability claims processed (determined) within 90 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	31% ¹⁰	23%	No
1.6.3.2	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA permanent impairment claims processed (determined) within 90 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	24% ¹⁰	31%	Yes
1.6.3.3	Timeliness: The percentage of MRCA incapacity claims processed (determined) within 50 days ¹	Percentage increase over previous year	68%	69%	Yes

1.6.4	Quality: Correctness rate of MRCA claims				
	- MRCA liability claims	>95%	90%	86%	No
	- MRCA permanent impairment claims	>95%	83%	84%	No
	- MRCA incapacity claims	>95%	86%	97%	Yes
1.6.5	Client satisfaction: The percentage of clients satisfied with the level of customer service they received when accessing their entitlements ³	80%	66%	54%	No

CP = Corporate Plan 2020–21; DRCA = *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*; MRCA = *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21

¹ We use timeliness measures as proxy tools to assess our efficiency. These timeliness measures can give an indication of efficiency over time.

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

³ Client satisfaction measures are established to assess the client experience in attempting to access their legal entitlements.

⁴ The survey results in relation to 1.4.1.3 were not available for inclusion in the 2019–20 annual report. The results became available later in the 2020 calendar year and have now been included in the 2020–21 annual report.

⁵ New measure for 2020–2024.

⁶ Policyholder satisfaction is measured through a monthly survey sent to 100 randomly selected policyholders who have recently had a claim finalised.

⁷ This figure is based on July 2020 to May 2021 surveys. Therefore any variation in results cannot be interpreted as a trend in changes to overall client satisfaction with Defence Service Homes Insurance.

⁸ 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'.

⁹ Students' level of education is collected and compared in November and March to identify whether a 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.

¹⁰ 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 31% for MRCA initial liability claims and 24% for MRCA permanent impairment claims.

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, 1.4.2, 1.5.3, 1.6.5

Analysis of performance against Outcome 1

Timeliness

In 2020–21, DVA exceeded the timeliness targets in 5 programs, with continued improvements on timeliness in the DRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.1.3) and MRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.2.3) over the past 2 years. Timeliness targets were also met for pensioner-initiated reviews (PIRs) (program 1.1.1.2), DRCA permanent impairment claims (program 1.6.1.2) and MRCA permanent impairment claims (program 1.6.3.2).

While the timeliness targets for income support claims (program 1.1.1) and funeral benefits (program 1.4.1) were not met, more than three-quarters of decisions were made within 30 and 10 days, respectively. The slight reduction in performance was due to the introduction of a new ICT processing system that initially slowed the processing of work, as the change required additional training and adjustment to processes. In the long term, it is envisioned that the introduction of this new system and related business process changes will enable efficiencies, which in turn will contribute to improvements in timeliness.

DVA has continued to experience an increase in claim numbers primarily influenced by the success of the Veteran Centric Reform – Putting Veterans and their Families First Program (Veteran Centric Reform) and the Veteran Recognition Program; as well as the changing nature of our veteran population. In 2020–21 there was an increase of 21,396 claims (20.2%) across the 4 major contemporary compensation streams. Over a 4-year period (2017–18 to 2020–21) there has been a 151.8% increase for these claims. This unprecedented growth has resulted in the number of new claims lodged exceeding the number of claims able to be decided, leading to longer wait times for veterans. The continued increase in the number of claims means we were unable to meet the timeliness targets set for DRCA liability claims (program 1.6.1.1) and MRCA liability claims (program 1.6.3.1) along with VEA disability claims (program 1.2.1).

The additional supplementary funding received from the 2020 Budget helped us to improve our results. For example, there was a 27.2% increase in the number of DRCA permanent impairment claims decided in 2020–21 compared with 2019–20, along with a 1.8% increase in MRCA liability conditions decided in the same period.

In the May 2021 Budget, the government invested an additional \$98.5 million over 2 years to provide DVA with a significant increase to its budget and staffing to address the backlog of claims and manage increased workload.

In addition to significantly more staff to address the increased claims volume, other improvements to processing times and the veteran experience include (but are not limited to):

- identifying further strategies to simplify the claims pathway for veterans and reduce red tape
- expanding Combined Benefits Processing, where the one delegate decides the liability and permanent impairment claims
- investing in learning and development to build capabilities of more delegates to assess claims where the veteran has eligibility under 2 or more Acts

- working closely with the Defence to identify members who are transitioning – in particular, those being medically discharged, to prioritise their claims to support continuity of health services.

We expect that the combination of additional resources and investment in training will result in improvements to the number of decisions made and active cases under investigation. However, the number of ageing claims on hand will continue to impact the time taken to process initially.

Quality

In 2020–21 we exceeded our quality targets for claims, PIRs (program 1.1), funeral benefits (program 1.4) MRCA incapacity claims (program 1.6.4) and the Veterans' Children Education Scheme (program 1.5).

DVA continues 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 results for delivering assistance to war widow/ers and dependants (program 1.3.2) improved throughout the year and the results for DRCA liability claims (program 1.6.2.1) and permanent impairment claims (program 1.6.2.2) improved in the middle 2 quarters of the year. Overall, the quality and correctness of decision-making under Outcome 1 programs was affected by the increased compensation claim volumes and the onboarding of new staff across multiple processing sites.

In 2020–21 we focused on inducting new staff and cross-skilling existing staff across the Acts and case types. This upfront training effort will assist in addressing the compensation claim volumes, while having a positive effect on the quality and correctness of decisions into the future.

Client satisfaction

In 2019–20 a new qualitative measure was introduced to assess the level of satisfaction among clients in their engagement 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.

A second Client Benefits Client Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by ORIMA Research Pty Ltd on behalf of DVA in 2021. The second survey covered veterans' claims experiences between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

The online survey was completed by 2,551 veterans, representing a 21% response rate. The survey results indicate that overall 57% of veterans are satisfied with the customer service they receive when engaging with DVA delegates, with younger veterans reporting lower satisfaction rates.

The survey included questions on the impact of COVID-19 on the claims experience. Around a quarter of veterans indicated that COVID-19 had a negative impact on their claims experience, mainly due to increased difficulty with aspects of the process (such as communication with DVA staff, appointment attendance and obtaining medical reports) and/or health and financial issues.

ORIMA also undertook a mail-out survey on behalf of DVA of clients accessing funeral benefits for the same period – 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Around 89% of respondents were satisfied with their customer service.

The Veterans' Children Education Scheme and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme (known as the Education Schemes) provide support to eligible veteran families. The Education Schemes assist the children and dependants of current and former ADF members who have died or been severely injured as a result of their service. Eligible children and dependants (students) must also be in full-time primary, secondary or tertiary studies in Australia.

DVA understands each student's academic goals are unique. So, in addition to the payment of the education allowance, eligible students can also access student support services, special assistance, guidance and mental health counselling.

In the 2021 Education Schemes Satisfaction Survey (program 1.5.3), 83% of respondents felt the Education Schemes support received by the student was effective or very effective in helping them reach their individual academic potential. Although this is 5 percentage points lower than the 2020 survey result (the highest satisfaction result to date), it surpasses the target of 75%.

Due to the need to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19, there was a delay in evaluating the Education Schemes. DVA expects to complete the evaluation in the next 12 months to help ensure Education Schemes support is targeted and meets the needs of students, now and into the future.

Efficiency

Efficiency measures are one way to further demonstrate how we are improving our processes and systems, and delivering more efficient services to veterans and their families over time while maintaining quality standards. An indication as to our efficiency is our ability to meet timeliness targets.

During 2020–21, timeliness targets were met – and improved on – in 5 programs, with a further 2 programs meeting timeliness targets in more than 75% of cases. The programs that have seen the largest increases in claims volumes in recent years, notably MRCA liability and DRCA liability, have been most impacted by extended processing times.

Processing times can be impacted by various external factors that are out of the control of individual claims delegates, such as implementation of new systems that temporarily reduce productivity, training of new staff, or the increase in complexity of claims such as multi-Act service eligibility or a high number of conditions within the one claim.

Each of these external factors impacted different programs and therefore the timeliness of decisions throughout the year. In particular, the recruitment and training of new staff following additional funding impacted all compensation programs. However, as those new staff complete their training program and receive ongoing coaching and mentoring from senior delegates, it is expected that both the volume and timeliness of decisions will improve.

Defence Service Homes Insurance

The Defence Service Homes Insurance Scheme (DSH Insurance) provides competitively priced home building insurance and claims support tailored to all ADF members and veterans who have served at least one day (including Reservists and widow(er)s of those ADF members). Administered by the DVA, DSH Insurance is self-funded through the premiums paid by policyholders, which is invested back into DSH Insurance – providing greater support to our veterans and their families.

For the year ending 30 June 2021, DSH Insurance provided coverage to over more than 50,000 serving and ex-serving ADF members' homes and managed more than 6,400 claims where our policyholders' homes were damaged – for example, in weather events such as the hailstorm in south-east Queensland in October 2020, the bushfires in Western Australia in February 2021 and the storms in Victoria in June 2021.

A sample of 100 policyholders who have had an accepted claim closed in the prior month are invited to complete the Defence Service Homes Insurance Claims Survey. The survey asks respondents to rate their satisfaction of the claims process and outcome. The average survey response rate for the year ending 30 June 2021 is 41%. The satisfaction results for the year ended 30 June 2021 sit at 89.88% – slightly below the target of 90%.

Achievements in 2020–21

Process Direct

On 23 November 2020 a major income support system change took place that saw the launch of Process Direct – a new ICT system designed around the income support needs of veterans and their families.

Process Direct is a whole-of-government platform that has become the main system our income support staff use. It offers streamlined information and greater efficiency so that veterans and their families may receive more timely outcomes and updates on their income support claims.

Development of the system was a key component of our Veteran Centric Reform program. By developing core ICT capabilities and transforming business processes through Process Direct, veterans and their families experience faster, simplified and easier access to services. We have seen improved DVA client and staff experience through:

- the introduction of Process Direct and Workload Management as an important step towards having a single staff interface for processing claims and changes of circumstances across the students, income support and compensation offsetting processing teams
- the implementation of Workload Management, which enables the automation of workload allocation to staff to manage client updates and claims based on business-determined priorities, such as key performance indicators, and client vulnerabilities. Workload Management ensures that the right tasks get to the right people at the right time. It removes the manual process previously undertaken by team leaders to enable them to focus on other areas of business
- automatic generation of most of our letters, removing the need for staff to manually create, print and mail letters, which ultimately saves time for staff and reduces errors from manual processing

- the implementation of the Assisted Client Claim, which has allowed staff to directly assist clients with Qualifying Service and Service Pension online claims
- enabling nominated representatives and third-party access capability for DVA clients in Process Direct. This allows faster processing of nominee relationships and a streamlined experience for clients
- delivery of an improved DVA Client Feedback Management System, which supports the monitoring and review of DVA service delivery performance
- automated eligibility assessment and issuing of the Veteran Gold Card for eligible veterans aged 70 years and over.

Since the launch of Process Direct, over the course of 2020–21 DVA, in partnership with Services Australia, has continued to resolve system issues and implement enhancements to Process Direct. This is to further enhance DVA operations across income support and improve services for our veterans and their families.

Simplification of VEA disability pension reassessments

As part of our commitment to being responsive to veterans and their families, we have continued to implement a range of initiatives to improve processing times and veteran satisfaction. For example, one outcome has been the simplification of the VEA disability pension reassessments process, aligning with the MRCA veteran-centric Optional Assessment Model.

When a veteran who is already in receipt of a disability pension lodges an Application for Increase or a claim for a new condition, delegates were previously required to reassess all of the veteran's accepted conditions. This process could take time and cause additional concern for veterans if there was no increase in their disability pension. Using the Optional Assessment Model, instead of undergoing a mandatory reassessment for all VEA accepted conditions, veterans will be able to inform DVA of which accepted conditions have worsened since their previous assessment, and only those conditions that have worsened will be reassessed. Any conditions that have not worsened will be assessed using the medical evidence applied in previous assessments with the veteran's consent. Delegates will work closely with veterans and consider each request on a case-by-case basis, ensuring evidence on hand is appropriate to use for a reassessment.

This approach has many benefits, including removing the blanket approach to reassessing all conditions, removing the need for multiple medical appointments, reducing waiting times for appointments and reports, and allowing the veteran to contribute to the reassessment process by providing input to their claim process. Importantly, this will reduce the stress on veterans and their families.

Improved engagement with veterans and their families throughout the claims process

Another way we have been more responsive to veterans and their families is to provide updates on the progress of their claim, especially for those who have been waiting for their claim to be processed.

DVA has established a dedicated team to contact veterans with the oldest liability claims to provide them with an update on the progress of their claim and advising them of the action taken on their claim to date, such as preliminary requests for information. In addition, checks on whether the veteran's circumstances have changed are undertaken to determine whether any are at risk.

This provides an opportunity to advise veterans of the supports and services that are available through DVA while they wait for their claim to be processed – for example, NLHC to access treatment for all mental health conditions; PAMT for 20 of the most commonly accepted conditions; and the Veteran Payment, which provides interim financial support for eligible veterans claiming mental health conditions under the MRCA and DRCA. The team will refer veterans to support services such as Triage and Connect, and Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling (Open Arms) where required. Since commencing in April 2021, more than 1,500 veterans were contacted and the response to the contact from the majority of veterans has been positive.

To ensure veterans are contacted regularly throughout the claims process, additional communication initiatives have also been established. From early June 2021 an SMS communication initiative has been used to maintain regular contact with veterans while they wait for their claim to be decided. This gives them an opportunity to advise DVA if their circumstances have changed or if they require additional support. The initial SMS is sent 30 days after the claim is received, and there are further SMS contacts at 60 days and 90 days.

Following this, an outbound contact team has been established within our VAN to contact veterans and proactively check in with veterans and provide reassurance and advice on services available. The VAN Proactive Claims Outreach Service aims to improve the veteran experience and outcomes by providing reassurance, support and guidance on services available while their claim is in progress. Commencing in June 2021, the service has assisted with establishing NLHC, Veteran Payment claims, establishing and linking MyService online accounts and explaining how veterans are supported through PAMT.

This multi-pronged approach will see regular engagement with veterans throughout the claims process and responds to the feedback received from veterans and their families through the Client Benefits Client Satisfaction Survey as well as other feedback channels. Early feedback from veterans has been encouragingly positive.

Provision of mainstream services during COVID-19

DVA continued to provide additional financial support through 3 separate COVID-19 Economic Support Payments issued in July 2020, November 2020 and February 2021, with 225,809 clients receiving one or more of these payments. The total amount paid as part of this government stimulus package was \$279 million. This payment will be ongoing for any client who becomes eligible due to a backdated grant of a qualifying benefit, on or before the relevant eligibility date for each payment.

In addition, between 27 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, a total of 1,714 children of veterans in receipt of Education Allowance benefited from the temporary fortnightly Coronavirus Supplement. The Coronavirus Supplement was paid at a rate of:

- \$550 per fortnight from 27 April to 24 September 2020
- \$250 per fortnight from 25 September to 31 December 2020
- \$150 per fortnight from 1 January 2021 until the payment ceased on 31 March 2021.

In association with whole-of-government initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, DVA clients could have their existing or new debt/overpayment recovery plans paused, adjusted or deferred if they were impacted by COVID-19. This approach allowed clients to continue to pay off their debts if their individual circumstances allowed them to do so, while providing options for other clients who may have been impacted by the pandemic.

The original debt 'pause/adjustment' period was from 1 June to 30 October 2020, and this period was extended until 28 February 2021.

In addition, over 95,000 DVA clients in receipt of a means-tested income support payment lived in areas affected by natural disasters. Natural Disaster Protocols were implemented to ensure that these clients were supported, including by prioritising decisions granting or increasing payments, reviewing existing debt recovery arrangements and pausing the issuing of new debt notices.

Summary

DVA has continued to see unprecedented numbers of claims being lodged as a result of the connection to and engagement with veterans and their families largely because of the success of the Veteran Centric Reform, the Veterans' Recognition Program and the changing nature of defence service. We know this has resulted in ongoing delays for some veterans and acknowledge the frustration and anxiety this can cause. We are continuing to work hard to improve the timeliness and quality of decisions, and we have implemented various initiatives to improve engagement with veterans to keep them better informed on the progress of their claim.

Following additional funding, DVA is training a large number of new staff to address the claims backlogs and improve processing times. We provide a comprehensive training program to ensure that all staff deliver lawful, quality decisions in a timely manner. Our quality assurance program provides a key mechanism for monitoring the correctness of our decisions and for informing ongoing improvements to our business processes. In addition to the injection of new staff, we are implementing a range of changes to simplify and streamline the claims process to not only improve timeliness but also improve the veteran's engagement and experience with DVA.

Year 4 of the Veteran Centric Reform focused on enhancing and streamlining the department's staff processing systems, particularly in income support and client management. The introduction of transport bookings and reimbursements in December 2020 saw a growth in the number of both users and claims in MyService. This growth is expected to continue as new features and improvements are made to allow veterans and their families to manage more of their DVA business online.

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 4 categories: access to health services, travel, counselling and rehabilitation.

Our PBS and the Corporate Plan 2020–21 set out performance measures and targets for each program under Outcome 2. Table 3 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2020–21.

TABLE 3: OUTCOME 2 PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND RESULTS

No	Performance criterion	Target	2019–20 Actual result	2020–21 Actual result	Achieved
Program 2.1: Provide access to general medical consultations and services					PBS p 48, CP p 20
2.1.1	Quality of service: The proportion of clients accessing services against the total number of clients who have registered a complaint in relation to unmet access and/or quality	>99%	99.95%	99.97%	Yes
Program 2.2: Provide access to veterans' hospital services					PBS p 49, CP p 21
2.2.1	Quality of service: The proportion of clients accessing services against the total number of clients who have registered a complaint in relation to unmet access and/or quality	>99%	99.96%	99.94%	Yes
Program 2.3: Provide access to veterans' pharmaceutical benefits					PBS p 50, CP p 21
2.3.1	Quality of service: The proportion of clients accessing services against the total number of clients who have registered a complaint in relation to unmet access and/or quality	>99%	99.99%	99.99%	Yes
Program 2.4: Provide access to veterans' community care and support					PBS p 51, CP p 21
2.4.1	Quality of service: The proportion of clients accessing services against the total number of clients who have registered a complaint in relation to unmet access and/or quality	>99%	99.61%	99.58%	Yes

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: The proportion of clients accessing services against the total number of clients who have registered a complaint in relation to unmet access and/or quality	>99%	99.55%	99.62%	Yes
Travel					
2.5.2	Target percentage of claims for reimbursement processed within the Service Charter timeframe (28 days)	95%	99.40% ¹	99.92%	Yes
2.5.3	Degree of complaints about arranged travel relative to the quantity of bookings	<0.05%	0.03%	0.01%	Yes
Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling (Open Arms)					
2.5.4	Percentage of clients allocated to a Veterans & Families Counselling Service (Open Arms) clinician within two weeks of intake ²	>65%	90%	87%	Yes
2.5.5	Client Satisfaction ³	>80%	91%	92%	Yes
2.5.6	Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre responsiveness capability ⁴	80%	98%	98%	Yes
Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme					
2.5.7	Clients with successful return to work ⁵	>50%	74%	44%	No
Program 2.6: Provide access to health, rehabilitation and other care services under DRCA and MRCA					PBS p 55, CP p 23
2.6.1	Timeliness: The percentage of rehabilitation assessments that were made within 30 days of referral for assessment	75%	88%	88%	Yes
2.6.2	Quality: Percentage of clients where rehabilitation goals were met or exceeded	75%	69%	70%	No
2.6.3	Client satisfaction: An annual survey of client satisfaction with the rehabilitation program ⁶	75%	66% ⁷	77% ⁸	Yes

CP = Corporate Plan 2020–21; DRCA = *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*; MRCA = *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21; Open Arms = Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling

¹ Performance measure result has been updated with unadjusted audit difference identified during the 2019–20 audit.

² The performance measure title has changed from the 2020–21 PBS to the corporate plan. It was previously 'Percentage of clients provided an appointment with a Veterans & Families Counselling Service (Open Arms) clinician within two weeks of initial assessment'. However, the approach to assessing this performance measure is unchanged. This measure indicates the timely allocation to an Open Arms clinician for counselling or other mental health support services and is an indication of how well we engage with our clients in their initial engagement with our service.

³ 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.

⁴ Percentage of calls received by the Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre to be answered in less than 180 seconds.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Client satisfaction is measured through a monthly independent survey by ORIMA Research of DVA clients who have recently completed the rehabilitation program.

⁷ This figure is based on July 2019 to May 2020 as this was the latest data available at the time that the results were due and ensured that there was no break in the data reported from the previous financial year.

⁸ This figure is based on June 2020 to May 2021 rehabilitation case closures using a new methodology incorporating the responses to a number of questions in the survey that indicate client satisfaction (or dissatisfaction). Therefore any variation in results from 2019–20 to 2020–21 cannot be interpreted as a trend in changes to overall client satisfaction rates. Due to the nature of this measure there will always be a delay in the data that can be reported. This is because where the results for the May 2021 cycle are reported, this refers to clients whose rehabilitation plans closed in May 2021. The annual result for future financial years will be based on June to May results.

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, funded by DVA. Providers send claims for payment directly to Services Australia, which reimburses the provider on DVA's behalf. In addition to observing uptake of services and associated program expenditure, DVA measures the success of this program by comparing the number of complaints registered by clients to the number of clients who accessed services.

In 2020–21 the number of clients who registered complaints was less than 1% 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 are outside the schedules have been declined. In most cases this is because there are services available within the schedules that are considered to be 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 variations in service delivery. In conjunction with contract management, it also allows DVA 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 2020–21 the number of complaints about arranged travel, relative to the quantity of bookings, was 0.03%, which meets the target of less than 0.05% 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 or less. The performance target for reimbursement of 95% of travel claims within 28 days was met and the processing figure of 99.92% was consistent with 2019–20. The performance target was previously 100% 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 2020–21 our processing percentages remained in the high 99% range for the financial year.

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 3 Acts – VEA, MRCA and DRCA – is continuing, and processing results indicate continued strong performance.

Counselling

In 2020–21, 87% of Open Arms clients were allocated to an Open Arms clinician within 2 weeks of their initial assessment. The target of 65% has been consistently exceeded each month over the financial year.

Open Arms maintained a high level of client satisfaction, exceeding the 80% target and achieving 92% of clients satisfied with services provided.

The Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre maintained its efficiency over the financial year and achieved 98% of all calls answered in under 180 seconds. This exceeds the target of 80%.

Rehabilitation

During 2020–21 DVA continued its work to improve the quality of services delivered by rehabilitation providers. For example, DVA:

- introduced additional key performance indicators for our contracted rehabilitation providers to ensure there are clear expectations about how DVA expects rehabilitation services should be delivered to clients

- published updates to further develop and refine the procedural guidelines we provide to support rehabilitation providers to deliver consistent and quality services on behalf of DVA
- provided a range of resources, including factsheets, process maps, weekly newsletters and training sessions, via the digital community for providers. This enabled DVA to deliver targeted and consistent messaging, information, training and resources to support service delivery
- introduced a new DVA Rehabilitation Knowledge Check, as part of the mandatory registration requirements for consultants. This check covers core principles that all rehabilitation consultants are expected to know in order to administer quality services as part of the DVA rehabilitation program. Two further mandatory modules have also been updated and require consultants to have an 80% pass rate before they can be registered.

In 2020–21 DVA did not meet the Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme target (program 2.5.7), with less than half of clients successfully returning to work after completing their rehabilitation plan. Anecdotally, the pandemic has had an impact on employment opportunities available to clients. In addition, clients can withdraw from the program at any time, and some do so when they feel they have gained enough retraining and skills to continue their job search independently.

DVA met its target for the number of rehabilitation assessments made within 30 days of referral (program 2.6.1). This result has remained consistent compared with 2019–20.

In 2020–21 DVA did not meet its target for the number of rehabilitation clients who have met or exceeded their rehabilitation goals (program 2.6.2). This result has remained consistent compared with 2019–20. There are a number of possible reasons that a client's rehabilitation goals may not have been met – for example, changes in medical capacity and ability to participate in rehabilitation; disengagement from the rehabilitation plan; and data entry limitations because of the way in which delegates have to enter Goal Attainment Scaling scores into the Rehabilitation and Compensation Integrated Support Hub. DVA will continue to explore improvements in this rehabilitation area.

Client satisfaction (program 2.6.3) is calculated through a survey of rehabilitation clients who have recently completed the rehabilitation program. DVA exceeded the target for client satisfaction in 2020–21. Clients are surveyed monthly; however, this measure is reported annually due to the time taken to run the survey and receive the data. The measure uses the responses to questions in the survey that indicate satisfaction (or lack thereof) with the program. We also 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.

Achievements in 2020–21

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 on access to health services

DVA engaged in a whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the response, the Australian Government provided temporary arrangements to allow some health and medical services to be delivered by telephone and videoconferencing; and established telehealth services so that clients could order prescriptions remotely and have them home-delivered.

In order to minimise DVA clients' risk of exposure to COVID-19, telehealth arrangements were extended to DVA's health funding arrangements so that clients could access a broader range of allied health services, community nursing, and hospital day programs for mental health and rehabilitation.

The availability of telehealth services minimised pressure on hospitals and emergency departments by allowing people to access essential health services in their home. They also supported self-isolation and quarantine policies to reduce the risk of exposure and the spread of COVID-19.

Military and Veterans' Psychiatry Training Program

The Military and Veterans' Psychiatry Training Program (MVPTP) has established 10 specialised psychiatric registrar training positions, on a rotation basis, in health settings treating military personnel and veterans. The MVPTP was an element of the 2020–21 Budget measure 'Increasing DVA Fees to Improve Access to Mental Health Support for Veterans'. By increasing the number of psychiatrists with training in military and veteran mental health, the psychiatry workforce will be better equipped to address the unique needs of military personnel and veterans. The MVPTP is being delivered by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists over the next 4 years.

Early Engagement Model

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

Carer and volunteer support

DVA's Community Support Advisers provided a customised service to ex-service and veteran support organisations to build capacity in the community to develop and run events, programs and projects aimed at increasing the health and wellbeing of local veterans and their families. The organisations were provided information about DVA services, referrals to community organisations and state and local government resources, support with local challenges, volunteer management and wayfinding to connect the organisations to the service, support or resources required.

Health and wellbeing

Twenty-five ex-service and veteran support organisations received funding from DVA for local initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of the veteran community. The projects included:

- health and fitness activities such as sailing, surfing, paddleboarding, aerobics, pilates and yoga
- skills development courses such as first aid and safety training, blacksmithing, art creation and water safety
- equipment such as surfboards and paddleboards, lawn bowls, digital projectors and safety equipment, as well as playground equipment for the children of veterans.

Wellbeing and Support Program

The Wellbeing and Support Program provides tailored and intensive case management support to 2 cohorts of veterans and their families who have complex medical and non-medical needs: veterans with complex needs transitioning from the ADF to civilian life; and former members who are experiencing crisis.

The program commenced in 2018, initially for a 2-year period. It was subsequently extended for an additional 12 months for the 2020–21 financial year to allow for a comprehensive evaluation. The formal independent evaluation was undertaken by the Flinders University.

The final report was delivered to DVA on 29 January 2021. The evaluation determined the weight of evidence demonstrated the program was very successful, with the case management model working well to improve the lives of participating veterans.

The primary recommendation of the evaluation was for the program to continue in its existing form or similar.

Veteran Wellbeing Centres Program

In 2019 the Australian Government committed \$30 million to develop a network of 6 Veteran Wellbeing Centres across Australia in partnership with ex-service organisations and state and territory governments.

These centres will deliver integrated support to veterans and their families. Once fully established, they will connect veterans and their families to a range of service providers. Core services for the network of centres include wellbeing services, support for transition, employment, health and social connection.

In 2020–21, DVA progressed establishment of the 6 centres, in consultation with local communities and ex-service organisations. The centres are located in Townsville, Perth, Adelaide, Wodonga, Nowra and Darwin.

Grant agreements for the 6 centres were executed, with 3 of the 6 – Perth, Adelaide and Townsville – officially open. The remaining 3 centres – in Nowra, Wodonga and Darwin – are delivering services to veterans and their families through interim premises. All centres are expected to be fully operational by mid-2022, in line with the government's funding commitment.

Approximately \$19 million of the \$30 million commitment to the program has been expended, with the remaining \$11 million on track to be spent in 2022.

Veterans' Health Week

Veterans' Health Week ran from 24 October to 1 November 2020, with the theme 'Social Connection'. Ex-service and veteran support organisations from all over Australia organised and ran events that created opportunities for veterans and their families to create new connections, try new things and learn new skills. DVA offered funding of up to \$720 per event and received and approved 393 applications. Of these, 389 were funded events and 4 were events that only requested registration on the DVA website. The total funding figure for Veterans' Health Week 2020 was almost \$254,000. DVA received an abundance of positive feedback about the events, and a large number of events were held either remotely or online to cater for all participants, despite the physical restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case management for transitioning members

In February 2020 the Prime Minister announced funding for additional case management support for the cohort of veterans aged under 30 who are transitioning from the ADF for medical or administrative reasons.

The case management approach supports veterans to access their DVA entitlements and any additional support through referral to external services using a case management plan that is based on the wellbeing needs of the individual.

The additional case management support commenced on 1 July 2020 with the establishment of a team of case managers within the Coordinated Client Support program.

During 2020–21, 185 medically or administratively transitioning members aged under 30 presenting with vulnerability indicators or complex needs were provided with case management support.

Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program

The Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program was developed as an adjunct treatment for veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD. A psychiatric assistance dog is trained to perform specific tasks that contribute to the management of a veteran's PTSD, such as detecting signs of distress or performing specific tasks to alleviate those symptoms.

In 2020–21 the program progressed in leaps and bounds. At 30 June 2021, the number of veterans assessed as being eligible to receive an assistance dog had grown from 94 to 259, while the number of dogs placed with their veteran handlers, after passing their Public Access Test, increased significantly during the same period from 5 to 34.

In 2020–21 an open procurement process increased the panel of providers to 4, enabling the expansion of this national program. Feedback on the program to date has been extremely positive, with veterans indicating improved quality of life, improved relationships with their family and an overall improvement in their mental health.

Assistance for veterans prescribed anti-malarial medications

In 2020–21 a series of lived experience workshops was conducted via videoconference to actively consult with the veteran community on how the program could provide the best experience for those who are concerned about having taken the anti-malarial medications mefloquine and tafenoquine. This consultation contributed towards the development of specialised training materials for general practitioners (GPs) to enable an effective and tailored assessment for concerned veterans.

By 30 June 2021 the program had recruited 8 GPs to provide health assessments to veterans. They are located in Brisbane (West End and Everton Park), Ipswich and Townsville in Queensland; Adelaide in South Australia; Sydney (East Hills) in New South Wales; Jerrabomberra serving the ACT; and Fremantle in Western Australia. The first health assessments were offered to veterans in January 2021. Opportunities to raise awareness of the program will continue throughout 2021–22, in line with the expansion of the GP network to other locations around Australia.

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. Early intervention and appropriate referrals can help veterans to enjoy better health outcomes and manage their health during their transition to civilian life.

By 30 June 2021 a total of 186 annual Veteran Health Checks had been conducted. This included a number of veterans returning to their GP to receive their follow-up annual assessment.

A number of promotional opportunities to raise awareness of the Veteran Health Check were conducted during 2020–21, with further activities planned for 2021–22. For example, during the first quarter of 2021, an opportunity arose for Services Australia to include promotional material on the Veteran Health Check in their service centres around Australia, providing broad exposure to the Veteran Health Check brand.

A Behavioural Insights trial to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of communications to encourage veterans to take up the annual Veteran Health Check received ethics approval and will commence during 2021–22.

Veterans' Employment Program

The Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program (VEP) increases employment opportunities for veterans by raising awareness of the skills and experience veterans can bring to the civilian workplace. In 2020–21:

- the number of signatories of the Veterans' Employment Commitment – a public commitment by organisations to recognise the skills and attributes of veterans when undertaking employment – increased to over 550
- 125 nominations were received for the 2021 Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the announcement of the awards winners has been deferred until early 2021–22
- the Support for Employment program was launched on 29 March 2021. Legislative authority to enable the commencement of the program was delayed due to the impact of COVID-19 on parliamentary sitting weeks. A total of 27 claims for assistance were received in 2020–21
- engagement activities included participating in virtual Defence Transition Seminars; and jointly hosting a webinar with Boeing Defence Australia and the Veteran Community Business Chamber on how veteran-owned businesses can join the Boeing supply chain.

Through the Enhanced Employment Support for Veterans grants program, RSL Australia, Soldier On and Disaster Relief Australia continued to provide direct support for veterans to translate their existing skills, build new skill sets and/or find civilian employment.

Also during 2020–21 a series of veteran-to-veteran and employer-to-employer advice videos was filmed. The films are to be hosted on the VEP website (www.veteransemployment.gov.au). They will complement existing veteran-to-veteran resources on the website to further reinforce the message that hiring a veteran is good for business.

Work also commenced on implementing 2020–21 Budget measures that will support veterans considering starting, or increasing the competitiveness of, their own business and building the evidence around veteran employment. This included preparations for a one-off grant to the Prince's Trust Australia and expanded access to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment New Business Assistance through the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, commencing 1 July 2021.

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 2 public hospitals. In 2020–21, 100 veterans and 37 current ADF members participated in TRP-PTSD at 8 hospitals nationally. Due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, some TRP-PTSD providers have chosen to deliver treatment services through telehealth, as it allowed for minimal disruption to these valuable services, while others have reduced services temporarily.

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. These programs are provided on behalf of DVA by Corporate Health Management (CHM). In 2020–21, group and individual programs were held in several states and territories. Because of the restrictions introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, DVA and CHM supported telephonic health coaching so that interested group participants could continue the program, as well as one-on-one programs for individuals.

Coordinated Veterans' Care Program

The Coordinated Veterans' Care Program continued to fund the development of comprehensive care plans and the coordination of care and plan delivery by General Practitioners for the most vulnerable Veteran Gold Card Holders. The program has assisted in reducing the level of unplanned hospitalisation and improved wellbeing among participants.

New and amended listings on the Repatriation Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits

As part of its biannual listings process, DVA continues to expand its range of medicines listed on the Repatriation Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits (RSPB).

On 1 December 2020 DVA listed 13 new items and 26 additional generic brands; and varied the prices of 34 already listed items on the RSPB. The items were for the treatment of a range of health conditions, including erectile dysfunction, renal failure, osteoporosis, pain and skin infections.

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling

Over the past year Open Arms has met an increased demand, delivering 34% more services than the previous year. Open Arms maintained 24/7 delivery of services such as individual and family counselling, utilising telehealth options when needed; and also community engagement and provision of digital self-help tools throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, Open Arms upskilled their clinical workforce to enable them to safely and ethically provide support through telehealth and improve their ability to assess and support vulnerable veterans or family members.

24-hour support

In 2020–21 Open Arms provided continuous support to veterans and their families and used SMS to conduct proactive reach-outs to clients impacted by increased COVID-19 restrictions and natural disasters. The 24-hour free and confidential support line remained open and answered more telephone calls than ever before – a total of over 107,000 calls.

Living Well resources

The Open Arms website was updated with additional and updated self-help resources to support the veteran community, creating the 'Living Well' section of the website. The site offers practical self-help tools as well as links to trusted websites and educational information. Importantly, there was specific content added to assist with issues faced by the veteran community, including how to cope with uncertainty, adjusting to a new state, and how to maintain social connections.

#Check5

Open Arms continues to grow their online presence, with an increase of over 100% in website views in 2020–21 from the previous financial year. This increase has been achieved by the successful running of digital campaigns – specifically the #Check5 campaign.

#Check5 utilised Open Arms Community and Peer Workers in the national grassroots campaign targeting suicide prevention. #Check5 was a call to action, challenging members of the community to check in with 5 of their mates and increase social connections. There have been 2 bursts of the campaign so far, with a potential audience of over 1.1 million people.

Community and Peer Program

In 2020–21 Open Arms had the opportunity to review the national implementation of the program to understand the progress, strengths and opportunities for improvement. As a result, Open Arms has continued to grow and develop the Community and Peer Program. This program provides clients with access to both veteran and family Peer Workers (Peers). Peers utilise their lived experience of ADF service or military family life and of mental health recovery to work in collaboration with clinicians to support Open Arms clients. Peers Teams work with veterans and their families to promote hope and offer a positive model of recovery, to de-stigmatise mental health issues and build help-seeking behaviours. Peers walk alongside our clients to increase connectedness and a sense of belonging; and support clients to access supports available. There is now a Community and Peer Team available in 23 Open Arms locations, including recent expansion to Nowra and Maryborough.

Clinical advisory services

In late 2020 the Chief Health Officer became responsible for the DVA clinical adviser workforce. This provides clinical advice within DVA under a Clinical Governance Framework which includes a clinical quality and performance improvement program. On 3 December 2020 DVA engaged Bupa Health Services to provide the DVA clinical adviser workforce from 1 April 2021 at the expiration of the previous contracting arrangements. A total of 81% of the incumbent clinical advisory workforce transitioned to the new contract, ensuring retention of corporate knowledge and minimal disruption to service delivery.

Under the Bupa contract DVA has access to technology systems which provide DVA with a number of benefits, including streamlined business processes and access to data and analytics to inform policy and services.

Summary

In 2020–21 DVA programs and initiatives enhanced the wellbeing of veterans and their families by successfully connecting many veterans to quality, evidence-based services and responsive supports at the time they needed them most.

We achieved a significant increase in client satisfaction from last year, continued to expand a range of medicines listed on the RSPB 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 and enabling systems to ensure that programs are delivered efficiently and effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impose unprecedented change in the way we operate. DVA has proven that, through improved digital channels delivered through Veteran Centric Reform, staff can be supported to be resilient, responsive and adaptable in the delivery of services to veterans and their families in changing circumstances.

Recognition 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 2 categories: war graves and commemorations.

Our PBS and the Corporate Plan 2020–21 set out performance measures and targets for each program under Outcome 3. Table 5 shows our results against our targets for each criterion in 2020–21.

TABLE 5: OUTCOME 3 PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND RESULTS

No	Performance criterion	Target	2019–20 Actual result	2020–21 Actual result	Achieved
Program 3.1: Provide and maintain war graves					PBS p 59, CP p 25
3.1.1	Official commemorations, war cemeteries, war plots and gardens of remembrance are maintained in accordance with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) specifications. ^{1, 2}	95%	n/a	80%	No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% of official commemorations are inspected at least once annually to ensure they continue to meet the CWGC standard. 				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of official commemorations that no longer meet the standard (through either environment factors, vandalism or ageing) improves compared to the previous year.³ 	Percentage not meeting standard	0.55%	0.64%	No

Program 3.2: Deliver commemorative activities				PBS p 60, CP p 26	
3.2.1	Commemorations are conducted to the satisfaction of the Australian public and Government as evidenced by: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commemorative event quality: Commemorative events are conducted to commemorate veterans' service in a dignified, solemn and respectful manner. 	The number of discrete complaints is less than 1% of the estimated audience for any one event	n/a	Achieved	Yes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant applications for the Saluting Their Service program are received from across a wide spectrum of groups in the community, including ex-service organisations, education, not-for-profit and other groups, and from a broad spread of locations around Australia.⁴ 	Achieved	n/a	Achieved	Yes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minister for Veterans' Affairs provides feedback annually on the degree of the Government's satisfaction with the outcomes of commemorative activities using a rating scale of very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. 	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Yes

CP = Corporate Plan 2020–2021; CWGC = Commonwealth War Graves Commission; PBS = Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21

¹ New measure for 2020–2024.

² Official commemorations (graves, headstones, bronze plaques) in Australia are maintained in accordance with the CWGC standards (each commemoration type has different specifications).

³ The performance measure has changed from the 2020–21 PBS and Corporate Plan. It was previously '95% of official commemorations that no longer meet the standard (through either environment factors, vandalism or ageing) are to be replaced or refurbished within the following industry average timeframes: graves < 6 months; columbarium or niche placement < 4 months; garden of remembrance plaque < 3 months'. The intent of the revised measure remains unchanged, which is to reduce the percentage of Category 4 – Major structural defects and Category 5 – Unserviceable commemorative assets compared to the previous year. The analysis of performance against Outcome 3 provides further context.

⁴ This measure is included for management purposes.

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 328,000 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. In 2020–21 an additional 1,857 eligible veterans received an official commemoration.

The OAWG welcomes feedback on the standards of maintenance and presentation of war cemeteries, graves, official commemoration plaques and monuments. The OAWG regularly receives acknowledgement and compliments from veterans, their families and the broader Australian community about the high standards of commemorations maintenance. In 2020–21 the OAWG received over 180 compliments on the care and maintenance of war graves and official commemorations provided across the nation, as well as the responsiveness and willingness of staff to provide support and assistance during times of family grief and reflection.

New reporting measures were set for 2020–21. Only 80% of official commemorations throughout Australia were inspected, and the percentage of assets not meeting the standard increased in 2020–21 by 0.09%. The results were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as staff were not able to gain access to sites to complete routine inspections. The additional funding to OAWG's Care and Maintenance Program provided in the May 2021 Budget will assist their ability to meet these inspection targets and reduce the backlog of category 4 and 5 commemorative assets.

In 2020–21 the OAWG undertook repointing and footing repairs to the South Australian and Western Australian Gardens of Remembrance, as well as design work for the redevelopment of the Hobart Garden of Remembrance, to be undertaken in 2021–22. OAWG also commenced the refurbishment of the Evans Head War Cemetery, which will be completed in 2021–22.

Commemorations

The measures relating to commemorative services were achieved. Extensive positive feedback was received on both commemorations, which were conducted in a COVID-safe manner. No complaints were received in DVA's Client Feedback Management System.

In 2020–21 commemorative services were successfully conducted for:

- the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra
- the 50th anniversary of Operation Overlord, including the Battle of Long Khanh, at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, Anzac Parade, in Canberra.

To support DVA's commemorative strategy, the Commemorations Branch created bespoke products to acknowledge and commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Victory in the Pacific, in August 2020. These were published on the Anzac Portal and distributed to stakeholders in a special mail-out. This was in addition to annual mail-outs for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

The annual mail-outs included educational resources for students and teachers, commemorative posters and books, and engaging digital products to tell the stories of veterans' service and Australia's wartime history. They were distributed to over 17,000 stakeholders around Australia, including schools, libraries, RSLs and other ex-service organisations, aged care facilities, and parliamentary representatives. Due to COVID-19-related restrictions in some states, the mail-outs were sent through digital and postal channels.

In 2020–21 the Anzac Portal continued to host DVA's digital commemorative presence. A large focus was responding to user feedback by upgrading the Commemorations section. This aims to help Australians who are making personal commemorations or hosting local events. New content for the Second World War and later wars and conflicts has been developed and added progressively to the Anzac Portal over the year. Given the ongoing restrictions on public gatherings, and periods of remote learning due to COVID-19, the Anzac Portal has provided an important commemorative and education space and resources for the community.

International Anzac Day services

In 2020–21 publicly attended 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. However, Anzac Day was marked by officials-only wreath-laying ceremonies at these locations in accordance with local COVID-19 restrictions.

Australians were encouraged to commemorate Anzac Day by watching a televised national service from the Australian War Memorial. Other complementary activities from DVA that formed part of Anzac commemorations included:

- an interpretive program (video product for TV), which was in a documentary style and included stories and interviews with veterans
- video and audio vignettes to complement the interpretive program
- an Anzac at home 'kit bag' in the form of a digital toolkit that contained a range of products to help Australians commemorate Anzac Day in their community or home
- a Virtual Poppy Wall – members of the public were invited to place a virtual poppy on a digital wall along with a message.

Saluting Their Service program

The measure relating to the Saluting Their Service program is achieved. DVA broke this measure down into 2 parts as follows.

The first part involves targets related to community groups. DVA identified 5 organisation types (ex-service organisations, education facilities, historical societies and museums, local/state government entities, and other) as key community groups. To achieve this part of the measure, percentage targets for 3 or more of the 5 organisation types need to be met. This is recorded as achieved, as DVA met the targets for the ex-service organisations, historical societies and museums and other.

The second part relates to volume of applications received from each state and territory. To achieve this part of the measure, percentage targets in 5 or more of the 8 states and territories need to be met. This is recorded as achieved, as DVA met the targets for every state and territory except Tasmania.

Achievements in 2020–21

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, DVA is also responsible for the care and maintenance of 31 official Australian memorials in 11 overseas nations and the operation of 3 interpretive visitor centres in France, Thailand and Malaysia. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the presentation, cleanliness and structural integrity of the commemorative memorials and sites were able to be maintained at a high standard throughout 2020–21.

The 3 interpretive centres were subject to a number of closures and reopenings throughout the year, in accordance with restrictions in place for public buildings in their respective countries, and with the safety of staff and visitors as the utmost priority. After 8 months of closure, the Sir John Monash Centre was able to reopen in June 2021 when restrictions eased as COVID-19 numbers decreased in France. The Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre in Thailand and the Sandakan Memorial Park in Malaysia were able to open to the public for short periods throughout 2020–21, with strict sanitary measures in place, but were forced to close in line with local restrictions. As at 30 June 2021, they remain closed.

Summary

DVA continued to meet the high standards that the Australian community and the CWGC expect. DVA is committed to improving our services on care and maintenance of official commemorations and memorials in Australia and overseas.

DVA delivered a number of commemoration events and activities that were well received by the Australian community and has continued to support the community by providing commemorative grants to community organisations to help preserve our military history, promote an understanding and appreciation of the experiences of service personnel and involve people around the nation in a wide range of activities that honour the service and sacrifice of Australians.

Case studies – know, connect, support and respect

Single View of Person – a reliable single source of veteran information



Desktop view of Single View of Person.

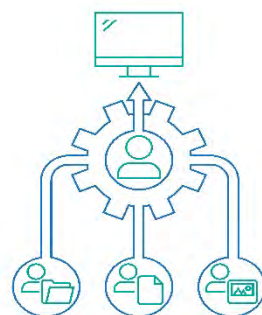
Since 2017, the Veteran Centric Reform program has been finding ways to help DVA to better *know, connect, support and respect* all veterans and their families. We have been looking at reforms to our business processes and systems, operating model and culture that will improve services and give veterans easier access to support. The improvements we make will equip our staff with the tools they need to deliver better and more timely outcomes for veterans and their families.

An important element of our transformation journey has been to improve our IT system so we can see the ‘whole veteran’, not just a condition or a claim. Previously, when veterans and their families contacted us to get advice on entitlements, submit a claim, check on the status of their claim or make a general enquiry, DVA had to navigate up to 20 different systems to find all the necessary pieces of information. We needed a system that could bring together all relevant client information on one screen.

In response to this, in late 2020, we launched the ‘Single View of Person’ (SVoP) interface. The SVoP interface has improved workflow by removing the need for staff to work across a number of complex systems to assist veterans and their families. By connecting with, and drawing from, multiple systems, SVoP displays all the key information about a veteran in a single dashboard. This has reduced the need to seek additional information from other areas while a veteran may be waiting.

SVoP also uses data from the veteran’s DVA records to proactively identify present and future needs and suggest services that may be available to them.

This new interface has been a ground-breaking improvement. We can now better *know* our veterans and their families and increase the level of service we provide. *Knowing* the ‘whole veteran’ has allowed DVA to provide veterans and their families with a more streamlined, personal and efficient service.



Programs can be combined into the one application as seen in this infographic.

Dogs are the pawfect companions for veterans living with PTSD



Leon and his veteran handler were the second graduates of DVA's Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program.

The Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program is having a profound impact on the day-to-day lives of our veterans and their families.

Psychiatric assistance dogs help veterans who are living with PTSD. The dogs are trained to the individual needs of their veteran handler and can perform specific tasks to help with recovery and general wellbeing.

DVA introduced Australia's first ever Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program in September 2019. In May 2020, the first assistance dogs, Leon and Zuma, graduated from the program and were placed with their new veteran handlers.

In 2020–21, a total of 34 psychiatric assistance dogs passed their intensive training program and went to live with veterans in need of support. A further 130 dogs were undergoing training across Australia as at 30 June 2021.

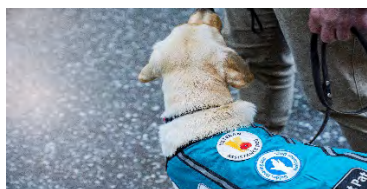
Feedback on the initiative during its first year was very positive, with veterans reporting a significant improvement in their lives with the dogs by their side. They say they feel calmer and can do things that they would not have done prior to training – for example, going out on their own, visiting the coffee shop and catching up with friends:

'If you had said to me 12 months ago that I would drive from Queensland to New South Wales and help one of our kids move and bring furniture on a trailer, I would have laughed and said I am staying here. We did that trip in December. We joined the march on Anzac Day and my dog got more cheers than the veterans I think.'

'I had not played sport for 5 years. Now I am back playing cricket with mates I have known for 30 years. Without my dog, I would not have played. All the boys know where I have been and what I have done and they're all very supportive of that. Having my dog there, I always have someone to look after me on the field. He has given me the courage to get back out and do stuff like that.'

DVA has also partnered with a team of experts from La Trobe University, Evolution Research and the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs Australia on a 4-year trial to establish best practice for training protocols, selection and monitoring of participants and assistance dogs.

The Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program is successfully addressing the needs of veterans now, and the trial will help us to improve the way psychiatric assistance dogs are supporting the treatment of PTSD for our veterans.



Hooper works with veterans developing skills as an assistance dog handler, through DVA's Psychiatric Assistance Dog program.

Veteran Wellbeing Centres providing services and support



Wellbeing Centre concept image. Credit to Silver Thomas Hanley.

At the last election, the Australian Government committed \$30 million to develop a network of 6 Veteran Wellbeing Centres across Australia in partnership with ex-service organisations and state and territory governments.

The centres are located in Townsville, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Wodonga and Nowra, with \$5 million allocated to each of these locations.

As these centres mature, they are delivering integrated support to veterans and their families from government, business and community partnerships. The centres help connect veterans and their families to a range of core services including support for transition, employment, health and social connection and advocacy. Three of the initial 6 centres are open in Townsville, Perth and Adelaide, with the remaining 3 delivering services from interim premises.

The first Veteran Wellbeing Centre opened in Perth, at ANZAC House Veteran Central, on 12 November 2020. The second centre – the Repat Veteran Wellbeing Centre, in the Repatriation Health Precinct in Adelaide – opened on 18 April 2021 and has quickly become a thriving and active space for the veteran community. The Oasis Townsville centre officially opened to the North Queensland community on 9 June 2021 as a place for social connection as well as a hub for services and support.

Veterans and their families living on the South Coast of New South Wales are also being connected with much-needed support services through a temporary location in Nowra. The Nowra Wellbeing Centre opened the doors to its interim premises on 10 May 2021.

As part of the 2021–22 Budget, the government announced further funding of \$10.7 million to expand the Veteran Wellbeing Centre network into south-east Queensland and Tasmania.

DVA is working collaboratively with the lead organisations in each location to maximise benefits for the local communities.

National service commemorates 50 years since Operation Overlord, Vietnam



Members of 1 Platoon, A Company, 3RAR, wait for word to move out. Right to Left: A (Anthony) Callus, P (Paul) Brudell, CR (Cleve) Thomas; KW (Keith) Harwood, PR McFadyen. (Ian Harris Collection)

On 7 June 2021 more than 500 Vietnam veterans, their families and dignitaries gathered at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial in Canberra to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Operation Overlord, including the Battle of Long Khanh – one of the last major Australian operations of the Vietnam War.

Operation Overlord, named after the Second World War Allied invasion of Normandy, with whose anniversary it coincided, was initiated to prevent the North Vietnamese from gaining a foothold in Phuoc Tuy province. The operation covered a large area of territory in the north of Phuoc Tuy, around the Courtenay rubber plantation, and into Long Khanh province.

Operation Overlord began on 5 June 1971. After 8 hours of intense fighting at the Battle of Long Khanh, the enemy troops withdrew. Regrettably, 3 Australians were killed at the battle and many were wounded. Another 7 Australians were killed some 5 days later on 12 June 1971 during the operation. Operation Overlord ended on 14 June 1971.

The DVA-run National Commemorative Service paid tribute to those Australians who lost their lives, as well as all Australians who served in action throughout the Vietnam War. Each of the 10 Australians killed during Operation Overlord was named and honoured, and many next of kin and friends of those who died made the trip to attend the service and lay wreaths at the memorial.

The commemorative address was delivered by His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd), Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion (3RAR), during the Battle of Long Khanh. Colonel Peter Scott DSO (Ret'd) delivered the Call to Remembrance, and memories of the battle were shared during the service by Robert Prideaux, Section Commander, 6 Platoon, Bravo Company, 3RAR. The Ode of Remembrance was read by Eddie Tricker, Delta and Echo Platoons, Headquarters 1st Australian Task Force.

The national service was an opportunity for Vietnam veterans to come together and reconnect, some after decades apart, to honour those who served on Operation Overlord and remember those who lost their lives during the operation. Those who were unable to attend the National Commemorative Service were able to watch it live on the ABC and through DVA's Facebook page.



RAAF Iroquois helicopters carrying troops prepare to take off during an air-mobile operation, Vietnam, 1971. (AWM P02866.030)

