

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 05 April 2019
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 1

Outcome: 1 Program: All

Topic: Budget Papers - Telephony efficiency

(FADT Hansard Proof 5 April 2019, p 62)

Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

Senator GALLACHER: You could hardly expect me to stop things moving on trucks with my background. The other thing that stood out was the telephone system. Is that a centralised system?

Ms Cosson: It's still quite decentralised. We have a number of offices across our state offices that do pick up our calls. We're reducing the hundreds of phone lines that we had into a single phone line, the 1800VETERAN line, to make it easier. We're also trialling new technology—open speech. Our veterans, when they phone now through 1800, can do voice recognition, but they still have the opportunity to go to a human if they need to. It's diverting the calls to the right operator through open speech. A lot of those efficiencies will improve the back-of-house services that we've been providing.

Senator GALLACHER: I haven't looked at your financial reports, but I suppose you have a telecommunications budget. Are you saying that centralising it to a 1800 number will mean you no longer have to pay multiple line rentals and multiple contracts over multiple offices?

Ms Cosson: That's correct.

Senator GALLACHER: Perhaps on notice, could we see a sample of that sort of efficiency and how much it does save?

Ms Cosson: Certainly.

Senator GALLACHER: I think it's a critical area of infrastructure improvement.

Answer

While the end goal is to consolidate over 160 numbers and introduce 1800 VETERAN as the primary point of contact for client enquiries, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) has not consolidated sufficiently to realise any significant savings at this stage. While the numbers have been identified for decommissioning, they have not yet been disconnected. They are still playing announcements to advise callers of the impending disconnection of the service and the correct number to call. The numbers are being reviewed to assess the call traffic. Based on the findings from these reviews, DVA will advise Telstra when the numbers are to be disconnected and removed from DVA billing. This is when the cost savings will be realised.

DVA spent \$978,924 on telephony in 2017-18. As DVA has retained the other telephone numbers for the time being, it is not expected that line rental costs will change significantly for 2018-19. The main goal of the 1800 VETERAN process was to provide an improved service for veterans by ensuring that all calls to DVA are answered by the right person, in a reasonable time.

Over time the new system will result in a more efficient use of our workforce, and some reduction in call costs. We are not able to provide an accurate estimate of the save at this time.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 05 April 2019
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 2

Outcome: 1 Program: All

Topic: Gender Analysis

(FADT Hansard Proof 5 April 2019, p 65)

Senator Claire Moore asked:

Senator MOORE: Can I just ask a question about gender analysis. Ms Cosson, I just want to ask one question about the preparation of your budget statement. I was talking with the Office for Women last night, and they were talking about the gender analysis process and how they provided training across the service to all departments so that doing a gender analysis of proposals was now widespread. Is that an element in the development of the budget response and the budget process in DVA?

Ms Cosson: Not that I'm aware of, Senator, but I'll check for you. But it certainly hasn't come to my attention.

Senator MOORE: I'm just following up. That'd be good. Thank you.

Answer

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) does not generally undertake gender based analysis during the preparation of New Policy Proposals (NPPs).

DVA's NPPs focus on eligibility, regardless of gender.

The Government's NPP template does include a reminder to consider gender. The due-diligence checklist includes these two questions:

- Has the proposal been reviewed to check it aligns with the Government's gender equality priorities?
- Have you consulted the Office for Women?

When completing these templates consideration is given to these questions.

For example, for the recent 2019-20 Budget measure 'Partner Service Pension – eligibility alignment', DVA did consult the Office for Women.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 05 April 2019
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 3

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant - Refresh Rollout Timetable

(FADT Hansard Proof 5 April 2019, p 67)

Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

Senator GALLACHER: Is it correct that there is an \$11 million cost for the refresh of all DVA cards?

Mr McHardie: The total program cost is \$11.1 million for the complete program. We have a regular refresh program, what we call the global refresh of our healthcare cards, which are obviously being replaced by this scheme. Everyone will hold a veterans card rather than a health card. The next global refresh is happening next year. That \$11.1 million is basically staffing and project management, business engagement, posting and printing, lapel pins and ICT development, so it encompasses more than just the cards.

Senator GALLACHER: Are you at the stage of a timetable for the rollout of those items under the \$11 million refresh?

Mr McHardie: Yes, we are, Senator.

Senator GALLACHER: Can we get a copy of that perhaps?

Mr McHardie: Yes, we could.

Senator GALLACHER: On notice would be fine.

Answer

The rollout of the Veterans' Recognition Program is on track.

- As of 31 March 2019, all veterans and reservists are now able to request veteran recognition from the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) online application MyService.
- DVA Health Cards have been rebadged to the new Veteran Cards with all new applicants now receiving a new Veteran Card. The Veteran Cards will continue being sent under existing arrangements.
- The Lapel Pins are being manufactured in Australia with the first shipment being received by DVA on 15 March 2019.
- DVA has recently signed a contract for the distribution of the Lapel Pin and a printed copy of the Covenant Oath.
- The broader global refresh of DVA's Health Cards has existing appropriation and no additional funding is required.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 05 April 2019
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 4

Outcome: 2 Program: 2.5

Topic: Dental and Allied Health - Concerns raised by providers

(FADT Hansard Proof 5 April 2019, p 68)

Senator Alex Gallacher asked:

Senator GALLACHER: There are a number of organisations which were advised of raised concerns, being the Australian Podiatry Council, the Australian Dental Association, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Physiotherapy Association, Occupational Therapy Australia and the Royal College of General Practitioners. Are you able to give us a rundown of what the concerns are that they've raised with the department?

Mr Cormack: I think it's fair to say that this is a change in the way that they manage their business. I think most of them have been very constructive. They're seeking to find out more about how the measure will work. They'll be looking to how it impacts on the way that they operate their business. Whenever we introduce any new measure, we consult. We'll be listening very closely to the input from those groups.

Senator GALLACHER: What would the Australian Dental Association have said to you?

Mr Cormack: I don't have that specific information available. I can only comment on the themes that I've just mentioned.

Senator GALLACHER: Perhaps if I could ask on notice if there have been specific concerns raised by podiatry, dental, psychological, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and the Royal College of General Practitioners, to see if we can get a sense of whether there's a general or generic concern or whether they are individual association concerns.

Mr Cormack: We can certainly do that, Senator.

Answer

All affected provider associations have been offered the opportunity to meet with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to discuss the four elements of the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure and subsequently DVA staff have met with six provider associations: Australasian Podiatry Council, Australian Dental Association, Australian Psychological Society, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Occupational Therapy Australia and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Discussions have focussed on the treatment cycle, technical adjustments to DVA's fee schedules, indexation and opportunities under future upgrades.

Australasian Podiatry Council (APodC) – DVA had a brief meeting by phone with the APodC following the 2018-19 Budget and provided further details on the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure. DVA also confirmed that indexation for DVA allied health fee schedules would resume from 1 July 2018. DVA briefly clarified how the treatment cycle would work and no concerns were received, noting that podiatrists would typically see patients for fewer than 12 sessions.

Australian Dental Association (ADA) – DVA met with the ADA and provided further details on the proposed technical adjustments to the dental fee schedule. ADA were generally supportive of the amendments which were implemented with effect on 1 November 2018. The ADA also advocated for increasing the level of DVA fees. Dental services are not included in the treatment cycle.

Australian Psychological Society (APS) – DVA met the APS following the 2018-19 Budget and provided further details on the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure. The APS provided a suggestion for the future upgrades related to neuropsychology.

Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) – DVA has met with APA representatives several times to discuss the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure. Discussions covered technical adjustments, the level of DVA fees, the treatment cycle and future upgrades. The APA has raised the impact of the treatment cycle on clients with complex health needs who may be inconvenienced by having to go back to the GP. The APA also advocated for increasing the level of DVA fees, and has expressed interest in being involved in trials of innovative funding models.

Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) – DVA has met with OTA representatives regularly since the 2018-19 Budget to discuss the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure. A major focus of these meetings has been the technical adjustments to the OT fee schedule. A number of technical adjustments were implemented with effect on 1 March 2019. OTA has discussed the impact of the treatment cycle on clients with complex health care needs, noting that OTs would typically see patients for fewer than 12 sessions. OTA has advocated to increase DVA fees for occupational therapy services. OTA is interested in trials of innovative funding models.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) – DVA met with the RACGP following the 2018-19 Budget and provided further information about the Improved Dental and Allied Health Budget measure. In general GP representatives have supported the treatment cycle's intent of improving patient care through greater GP engagement.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2019 - 2020 – 05 April 2019
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 5

Outcome: 1 Program: All

Topic: MyService - Identifying as being in a same-sex marriage

(FADT Hansard Proof 5 April 2019, p 69)

Senator Claire Moore asked:

Senator MOORE: Sorry. Ms Cosson, I want to clarify an issue with MyService that has come up. In terms of a veteran who is part of a same-sex partnership and identifies as being same-sex married, are they able to access MyService?

Ms Cosson: Absolutely. MyService doesn't discriminate at all on gender or marital situation.

Senator MOORE: Is there anything when they apply where they have to identify? An issue has been raised about different IT systems, that the DHS system actually does accept the code or statement of being in a marriage but the DVA one doesn't accept 'marriage'; it accepts 'partner'. That's the statement. I'm just wanting to put it up there—

Ms Cosson: I'll have to have a look, Senator.

Senator MOORE: Could that be checked out? It has actually been raised as an issue. It sounds to me like it's about confusion, but it was a particular concern.

Ms Cosson: I'll certainly take that on notice, Senator, and have a look.

Senator MOORE: Thank you very much.

Answer

There are no claims in MyService that require relationship details. There is a relationship page that is static and shows the name of any existing partner or child. It is drawn from the existing Department of Veterans' Affairs data and cannot currently be edited. It does not differentiate on sex or relationship type.