

**Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**  
**Supplementary Budget Estimates 2021 -2022 – 27 October 2021**  
**Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

**Question 13**

**Outcome: All Program: All**

**Topic: Assistance dogs statistics**

(FADT Hansard Proof 27 October 2021, p 113)

**Senator Rex Patrick asked:**

Senator PATRICK: In the answers you provided me you talked about the number of veterans who have been approved for the provision of a DVA assistance dog. In 2019-20 it was 74 and then in 2020-21 it was 132. So there was an increase, but that's not surprising because the program had just started. Then the question was: how many have actually got a dog? The answer for the previous year was five and last year was 29. They were helpful numbers. Then I asked you: what's the waiting list? And you said, 'There is no waiting list.' I might put it to you that, if I stuck up my hand and said, 'I'd like to have a dog, to assist,' and you process me and I don't have a dog yet, I'm on a waiting list. I just found that answer extraordinary, noting you provided me with the data that suggested otherwise.

Ms Rundle: Do you mind if I make a comment on that?

Senator PATRICK: Absolutely; that's the point. We're having a conversation.

Ms Rundle: Perhaps we could have answered that better. You've seen the data, and those numbers have increased again. We have total veterans accepted into the program, because we find that they're eligible. Then there are some who are declined at that time, at least. Once the four providers have the ability to take more—so as they finish one they might let us know that they can take another or, if they are expanding, they can take a few more—the people on the waiting list get allocated to that number. We have that number. As at 26 October, we have 307 who have been accepted into the program. We've got 144 of those who are currently in the program, and we've so far completed 47, who have finally passed their second test and are placed with a veteran. Probably, if we were to take a proxy, we're talking about the balance of those who aren't in training and those who are still on the list awaiting allocation.

Senator PATRICK: You can see why I was concerned with that answer—it didn't seem to make a lot of sense to me.

Ms Rundle: Yes.

Senator PATRICK: How many veterans have we had since Afghanistan? What are the numbers? This seems like a really low number. I'll state up-front that I'm a big fan of the program. I'm just trying to understand the demand versus the response. How many veterans do you have on your books?

Ms Cosson: We've got 240,231 veterans on our books.

Senator PATRICK: I just don't believe the numbers there, knowing the success of the program.

Ms Cosson: There are a couple of things. Probably, it's the criteria for being allocated a dog when you apply saying you have a clinical diagnosis for PTSD and that your clinician recommends that you will get a benefit from a dog. That's one category. Some veterans have already got a dog, so they're not actually in this program. But yes, it is a fairly low number, when you think that 39,000 veterans served in Afghanistan.

Senator PATRICK: I want to get the full picture. Could you lay out the full number of veterans, then the ones who come to you—and even if they're not eligible, I'd like to get an understanding of that—then those who are eligible? Perhaps you can update this list so we can see what's happening down the chain.

## Answer

As stated by the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) at the 27 October 2021 Senate Estimates hearing, the number of veterans receiving supports and services from DVA is 240,231. This does not include families and dependent children.

As at 12 November 2021, the number of Afghanistan veterans known to DVA is 24,947 (of the approximate 39,000 military personnel who served in Afghanistan).

Since the commencement of the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program in September 2019, DVA has received a total of 350 applications.

As at 17 November 2021, these applications can be separated into:

Graduate veterans (Passed their public access test and now handed over to veteran)	50
Active applications	228
Applications in initial assessment phase	(10)
Applications in stage 2 of the assessment process	(28)
Veterans in dog matching / personalised program development phase	(45)
Veterans in training phase	(145)
Declined applications	28
Self-withdrawn applications	48
<b>Total Applications</b>	<b>354</b>

In addition, the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program has also received a further 109 enquiries from veterans about privately sourced dogs. These enquiries are varied but generally relate to a:

- veteran has a certified assistance dog and is seeking recognition under DVA's Program;
- veteran enquired about having their companion dog trained as an assistance dog; or
- veteran enquired about the supply of a companion dog under the Program.