



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

Office of the Secretary

Committee Secretary  
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Access Card - Inquiry into Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007**

This submission is intended to improve the Committee's understanding of veterans' issues relating to the Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007 as tabled in the House of Representatives on 7 February 2007. It is supplementary to the Australian Government submission from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and will cover veteran specific issues.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) has sole portfolio responsibility for Australia's repatriation system which supports those who serve or have served in defence of Australia. The Department provides a range of payments, benefits and services under the various legislation it administers.

DHS is implementing the Health Benefits, Veterans' and Social Services Access Card (the Access Card). This initiative will significantly improve the infrastructure supporting the health and social service system by enhancing data and system security, reducing fraud and enabling the replacement of 17 existing cards, including DVA's cards, with a single Access Card.

DVA is working in close co-operation with DHS to ensure the implementation of the Access Card continues to support DVA's high standard of service delivery to the veteran community.

DVA has a long history and a unique relationship with its client base. This is achieved by a very interactive approach to identify the ongoing and changing needs of veteran and defence force communities. The Veterans' Satisfaction Survey continues to validate the quality of DVA services with the June 2006 indicating that 90% of respondents were satisfied with DVA's services.

While veterans will continue to deal with DVA about their veterans' benefits and entitlements, the introduction of the Access Card will mean once-only updating of change of address and personal details. This will reduce the need to fill in forms, visit or telephone DVA, Medicare Australia and Centrelink offices. It also means that if it is more convenient

for a veteran to change their address with DVA by visiting a Medicare Australia office at the local shops instead of contacting the DVA office, the Access Card will make this possible. Of course, veterans will continue to deal directly with DVA regarding their specific compensation, income support or health issues.

DVA issues six cards that will be incorporated in the Access Card program.

DVA treatment cards:

- Repatriation Health Card – For All Conditions (Gold Card)
- Repatriation Health Card – For Specific Conditions (White Card).

Other DVA specific cards:

- Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Card (Orange Card)
- War Widow's/Widower's Transport Concession Card (TC1) which provides State funded travel concessions in Victoria.

Other DVA-issued Commonwealth cards (equivalent to Centrelink issued cards):

- DVA Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) which entitles the card holder to Australian Government benefits such as pharmaceuticals at concessional prices, hearing services and a range of concessions and discounts from state and local governments and businesses.
- DVA Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC), which provides entitlement to concessional rate prescription medicines and access to telephone and seniors concession allowances.

These cards are issued based on individual entitlement regardless of a person's age. At 30 June 2006 there were 305,229 DVA treatment card holders comprising 250,957 Gold Cards and 54,272 White Cards. The health care and support services provided by these cards include general practitioner services; specialist services including pathology and radiology; podiatry, physiotherapy and other allied health services; dental care; community nursing; spectacles and hearing aids; care in public and private hospitals; and home support services.

While DVA's Gold and White Cards are primarily for the procurement of health services funded by DVA, they do have a secondary use as an indicator of concession status recognised in the general community. These discounts and concessions are not funded by the Commonwealth, however DVA supports the inclusion of unique card colour and markings for the veteran community to ensure easy recognition of their status and continued access to these additional benefits.

### Service Providers

DVA has established contractual arrangements with around 50,000 service providers to ensure clients seamless and timely access to services. DVA will work within its existing relationships with Medicare Australia and its direct relationships with health service providers to ensure there is a complete understanding of the Access Card among these key stakeholders and continuity of quality service delivery for veterans in the transition to the Access Card.

The information needs of clients at all stages of their relationship with the Department are met by promoting service delivery access channels tailored to the expectations and requirements of client groups and DVA's capacity.

Once the Access Card is fully implemented, DVA will provide continuity of services for veterans. A veteran will not be denied a service because they cannot produce their Access Card. Rather DVA will work behind the scenes to sort out the necessary details and any follow up required. For example currently there are many ways to demonstrate eligibility for counselling services via the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, of which showing a DVA card is only one. With counselling in particular, looking after the mental health of veterans is a higher priority than ensuring the veteran has their card with them. This attitude to service provision is part of the unique relationship DVA has with the veteran community and this service delivery standard will continue.

In recent years DVA has seen an increase in the use of the telephone and a decline in the number of veterans attending offices for support and assistance. Telephone contact now comprises more than 75% of all interaction between DVA and veterans. These patterns are expected to continue.

DVA relies on authenticating a person as quickly as possible when they contact us by phone or letter. Currently DVA clients quote the file number which is embossed on their card. Without a number on the card the client will need to identify themselves via multiple references, making client contact more difficult and time consuming than current arrangements.

DVA Gold and White cards rely on the service provider quoting the number on the face of the card to raise the necessary invoice or correspondence with DVA. With a number on the face of the card, providers can continue to manually invoice DVA during the transition period when both current arrangements and the Access Card are in place, and it provides a method of business continuity in the event automated systems go down.

DVA also recognises the need to provide support for those current serving members of the Defence Force that may seek to contact DVA by electronic means. The Access Card will have the capacity to provide two factor authentication to assist in providing secure online communication.

The card will have additional value for the veteran community, as research evidence indicates that older veterans in particular see the benefit of having a Government-issued card with their photo on it. While clearly recognising that the purpose of the card is not as a mandatory identity card, for those without photographic documentation such as a passport or driver's licence the ability to voluntarily show a card with their name and photo on it can be a key benefit for older Australians.

### **Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007**

Clause 17, paragraph 10 (i) of the Bill provides for a gold coloured Access Card for current Gold card holders with the option for the cardholder to choose a standard coloured Access Card. The Gold card is held in high regard by veterans, a status which should be maintained in the transition to the new Access Card arrangements. It also provides easy visual recognition for service and concession providers.

The Bill (Clause 17, 30 and 34) allows cardholders to opt for DVA markers on their Access Card: TPI (Totally and Permanently Incapacitated); WAR WIDOW; POW (ex Prisoner of War); EDA (Extreme Disablement Adjustment), DEPENDANT; and BLIND (Blind). These

markers continue the current practice of pension type recognition on the existing DVA Gold card. Veterans groups are keen to maintain this recognition as it helps them access concessions in the community. The TPI Federation has made ongoing strong representations for the existing TPI badging to also appear on the face of the Access Card, and the War Widows Guild endorsed a motion to similar effect at their national conference in 2006.

Clause 17, paragraph 10 (g) and clause 30, paragraph 7 (g) which provides for 'DVA White Card Holder' to be on the chip and the surface of an Access Card. The White Card provides eligibility for DVA-funded treatment only for a cardholder's specific, recognised conditions. For treatment related to other conditions, card holders may access Medicare or retain private health cover. However, the card also provides evidence of a card holder's veteran status for some third party concessions so it is important to ensure that there continues to be visual identification on the surface of the card.

These indicators help service and concession providers identify the card holder as a member of the veteran community however it will be the cardholder's decision whether to include these indicators on their Access Card.

Clause 65 of the draft Bill provides the power for the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Secretary of the Department to exempt classes of individuals and individuals from certain requirements of the Access Card registration process. This clause acknowledges that aspects of the registration process are likely to be difficult for some members of the veteran community. For example they may not have the necessary registration documentation or their health conditions may inhibit their ability to attend or participate in the registration interview.

The exemption powers are designed to maintain the balance between the dignity of members of the veteran community and the integrity of the registration process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007. DVA representatives are available should the committee require clarification on any matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely



Mark Sullivan  
SECRETARY

28 February 2007