


November 2023

# Recommendation Implementation Report

**Investigation into the  
Department of Veterans'  
Affairs' communication with  
veterans making claims for  
compensation**







<p><b>Why did we do this report?</b></p> <p>The report on our <a href="#">Investigation into the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) communication with veterans making claims for compensation</a>, published in January 2022, considered the appropriateness of DVA's policy and procedural framework for communicating with veterans during the claims process.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to provide transparency and assurance regarding DVA's actions in implementing recommendations from our investigation report.</p>	<p><b>What did we recommend?</b></p> <p>Our 2022 investigation report did not identify any significant concerns about DVA's policy and procedural framework but we identified some opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>We made 8 recommendations aimed at strengthening the accessibility and transparency of information available to veterans and the internal guidance available to support DVA's decision makers.</p> <p>DVA accepted all 8 recommendations.</p>
<p><b>How did we assess implementation?</b></p> <p>We conducted a desktop review of DVA's implementation of these recommendations. This involved considering management assertions provided by DVA, reviewing copies of documents and DVA's internet site. Where our review of material provided by DVA led to further questions, we sought additional information from DVA.</p> <p>While we engaged with DVA to obtain a high level of confidence about the implementation of our recommendations, we cannot provide unqualified assurance of DVA's adherence to improved processes and policies in day-to-day administration and operational activities.</p>	<p><b>What did we find?</b></p> <p>We finalised our assessment of DVA's implementation of the recommendations in September 2023.</p> <p>We found that DVA has implemented all 8 recommendations.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>
<p><b>Next Steps</b></p> <p>We have made some additional comments to DVA about further improvements it should make to ensure staff are aware of and adhere to the changes made because of our investigation. DVA have advised that these improvements have been implemented.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is limited to considering how DVA amended its policies and procedures to implement our 2022 recommendations. We are aware that experiences of individuals may differ. We take an interest in the way any agency communicates with the public and retain the ability to further consider the effectiveness of these policies and procedures in practice if we consider it necessary, either on our own initiative or in response to any complaints to our Office.</p> <p>Systemic improvement in public administration is an ongoing process. DVA should periodically review the effectiveness of the improvements and make further improvements when needed. In conducting these periodic reviews, DVA should consider any complaints received as a source of information to inform continuous improvement.</p>	



## Commonwealth Ombudsman assessment – DVA’s implementation of recommendations

#	Recommendations	Status	Commonwealth Ombudsman Comments
1	DVA publish and update regularly current average processing timeframes for claims under the <i>Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986</i> , <i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> and <i>Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related claims) Act 1988</i> .	Implemented 	DVA is publishing and updating regularly on its website, current average processing timeframes for claims under the <i>Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986</i> , <i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> and <i>Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related claims) Act 1988</i> (see <a href="http://www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing">www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing</a> ). DVA advises that this information will be updated monthly.
2	DVA include in its acknowledgement letters to veterans a statement advising that current average processing timeframes are published on its website.	Implemented 	The acknowledgement letter template provided to our Office by DVA includes a statement advising that current average processing timeframes are published on its website with a link to the relevant information. DVA also provided a copy of its communication to staff advising them to include this statement in outgoing emails and letters.
3	DVA introduce a policy requiring regular review of its webpage design and content about compensation claims to ensure information is published consistent with the Australian Government Digital Service Standards.	Implemented 	DVA have implemented a new Content Owner policy. This policy requires website content to be reviewed regularly and written and published in accordance with relevant standards, policies and guidelines (including the Australian Government’s Digital Service Standards and Style Manual). It assigns roles and responsibilities for staff involved in developing and publishing content. The policy provides overarching guidance to assist in determining the appropriate review period for the content. DVA has advised that its content management system facilitates automatic email alerts when content ‘expires’, following which the responsible staff member must either confirm the content remains accurate, update or remove the content.
4	DVA update its Guidelines to include all information delegates should include in acknowledgement letters	Implemented 	We reviewed a copy of DVA’s updated guidelines, last amended 17 October 2022. The updated guidelines include instructions to delegates to include information identified through our investigation in acknowledgement letters such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the date the claim was received by DVA</li> </ul>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the impact of DVA's backlog on claim processing timeframes, and</li> <li>- information about how to access other supports such as Open Arms or provisional medical treatment.</li> </ul>
5	DVA publish information that outlines the general steps involved in the claim process.	Implemented 	<p>DVA has now published a step by step process on its website which highlights the key steps that take place during the investigation of a compensation claim (<a href="https://www.dva.gov.au/what-to-expect-after-you-have-submitted-a-compensation-claim">What to expect after you have submitted a compensation claim   Department of Veterans' Affairs (dva.gov.au)</a>).</p> <p>We are satisfied that information outlining the general steps involved in the claims process is now available on DVA's website.</p>
6	DVA develop guidance materials to assist its staff to communicate with veterans so they can identify and make decisions on claims that should be prioritised.	Implemented 	DVA have developed a 'Risk Indicator Guide' and talking points for staff communicating with veterans, to assist staff identify and make decisions on prioritising claims. DVA's new 'Compensation Claims Communication Standards' (the Communication Standards) requires claim progress updates to be provided every 30 days pre and post allocation.
7	DVA develop a policy to outline the frequency and mode of contact it requires delegates to have with veterans.	Implemented 	<p>DVA have implemented a policy, the Communication Standards, that outlines when contact with veterans is required, the purpose, frequency and mode of each contact.</p> <p>DVA should link its 'Risk Indicator Guide' and talking points within the Communication Standards, with supporting guidance, to ensure staff consideration of the matters outlined in these documents when communicating with veterans.</p>
8	DVA clearly outlines to veterans as early as possible, the potential consequences of not providing additional information.	Implemented 	<p>DVA has developed talking points which direct staff to outline to veterans the potential consequences of not providing additional information, including that the claim may be determined on the available evidence which may result in a claim being denied. DVA has advised our Office that these talking points are intended to support staff when communicating with veterans over the phone or in outgoing correspondence when requesting additional documentation.</p> <p>To ensure staff are aware of and follow these talking points in verbal and written communication, DVA should link the talking points in its Communication Standard with clear guidance to staff when this information is to be provided to veterans.</p>





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

SECRETARY

Ref: EC23-001288

Mr Iain Anderson  
Commonwealth Ombudsman  
By email: StrategicInvestigations@ombudsman.gov.au

Dear Mr Anderson, *Iain*

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 October 2023 providing the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) with the opportunity to respond to your Recommendations Implementation Report, which outlines your Office's assessment of DVA's implementation of the eight recommendations from your own motion investigation into DVA's communication with veterans making claims for compensation.

Please consider this letter as DVA's formal response to your Recommendations Implementation Report (RIR). I note you intend to include this letter as part of the RIR and to publish the RIR on your Office's website.

I am pleased your Office has determined that DVA has implemented all eight recommendations. Thank you for making two new, additional suggestions in the RIR for further improvement that DVA should make to ensure our staff are aware of and adhere to the changes introduced as a result of your investigation.

To address these suggestions, DVA has updated the *Compensation Claims Communication Standards* policy to include a link to the monthly Claim Delay Talking Points and Risk Indicator Guide within in a centralised location available to all staff. Additionally, DVA has updated the *Compensation Claims Communication Standards* policy to include a link to the new claims service charter, *Our Commitment to You*, developed since the *Compensation Claims Communication Standards* policy was first published.

I would like to thank your Office for the thorough way they have approached this investigation. The implementation of these recommendations has helped us to better communicate with our clients and, most importantly, helped them to better understand DVA's processes and timeframes.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison Frame'.

**Alison Frame**

3 November 2023