

# AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS



## QUEENSLAND

**Since 1947**



## RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO  
COMPENSATION & REHABILITATION  
FOR VETERANS

# CHALLENGE 1

Insufficient governance & regulatory requirements to support ESOs utilising public funding

ESOs are important: They provide valuable services to recipients (veterans, individuals about to become veterans and widows) and government. Let's take a look at just how important they are:

## THE VALUE OF ESOS

1. ESOs are on the ground - they have knowledge of the day-to-day challenges that recipients face. The staff and volunteers of ESOs talk with service recipients, listen to their grievances, support them through tough times and walk with them through their journeys;
2. ESOs have skilled personnel - they deliver services to recipients that requires knowledge and experience in counselling, advocacy, systems navigation, emergency support and many other areas. These skilled personnel of ESOs should ultimately reduce burden and cost on government;
3. ESOs provide 'service arms' for government by operationalising government strategies;
4. ESOs provide valuable input to government strategy. They ensure that government is aware of the needs of service recipients and that policy is fit for purpose.

AWWQ has been supporting war widows for 71 years. The increased competitiveness of accessing funding to deliver those services is a growing concern. With several thousand ESOs competing for the same funding to support recipients, there is a need for a robust quality-focused framework to support and monitor ESOs. Not all service providers are held to account for outcomes nor is there an effective method of ensuring that all service providers meet the same standard of

quality service provision. Lack of clarity around the expectations of ESOs has undoubtedly left them floundering and led to many of them 'rowing their boats' in different directions.

The Productivity Commission Draft Report, page 35 states the following:

*"... This lack of coordination among ESOs may be diluting their effectiveness."*  
Productivity Commission Draft Report

We put forward that the lack of coordination among ESOs is **certainly** diluting their effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of government policy and the end outcome for service recipients. ESOs are instrumental in ensuring the intentions set by government are shaped by recipient and industry feedback. They then operationalise these intentions at a grass-roots level. The profound importance of ESOs, on both ends of the service spectrum, is undeniable. It is for this reason that AWWQ supports the implementation of a Quality Framework - we see it as a vital component for any successful outcome stemming from this Productivity Commission Review.

A lack of regulatory monitoring has had devastating effects in many sectors: government bodies invest a great deal of time and human resources into creating well-intentioned plans but the front-line service providers (in many cases) do not mirror that intent. As a result, nothing actually improves for the service recipients.

# RECOMMENDATION

Implement a system of quality indicators for ESOs using public funding for service provision

AWWQ believes that ESOs should provide evidence against a set of quality indicators in order to provide services using government / public funding. A regulatory framework with clear and relevant Quality Indicators supports governance, transparency and a client-centric approach to service delivery. It enables the following questions to be asked:

1. What governance controls does the ESO have in place to ensure that strategic goals are aligned to the actual needs of service recipients? How are these controls evidenced?
2. What operational controls does the ESO have in place to ensure that service provision is informed through recipient and industry feedback on a macro and micro level? How is this evidenced?
3. What financial controls exist within the ESO to ensure sustainability and appropriate use of government funding? How is this evidenced?
4. What systems does the ESO have in place to ensure that service provision is driven by a quality-led, systematic continuous improvement approach? How is this evidenced?

5. What evidence does the ESO provide to show that services are delivered in a manner that is fair, equitable, inclusive, culturally safe and aligned to mandatory legislation?

6. What are the measurable outcomes being produced by the ESO? What reporting structures are in place to ensure that funding is being utilised in a manner that produces maximum return on government/public investment?

7. What knowledge, skills and experience do staff have to ensure quality outcomes? (draft recommendation 9.2).

It is worth noting that in order for point 7 and Draft Recommendation 9.2 to work, there needs to be supporting measures put in place to ensure that individuals have access to appropriate training (please see example below).

## Example: Becoming an Advocate

Currently there is only one Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that delivers the ATDP Advocacy Program. A prospective learner must undertake this program to be accepted by DVA as an advocate. However, in order to undertake this learning program, a prospective learner must first find the RTO responsible for delivering the course. Once a prospective learner finds the RTO, they learn that they have to be recommended to the program by someone already in industry before they can even reach the stage of enrolment. There are too many barriers to entry, and this is an access and equity problem that would benefit from attention.

## CHALLENGE 2

The Draft Review is not fit for purpose for war widows.

### BENEFITS

Whether it be veterans, individuals about to become veterans or war widows, one common theme is their need for quality service provision from a trusted organisation that meets their real needs. If ESOs were clear about their expectations around service delivery - and held to those expectations - the end-recipient of the service would benefit from consistent quality.

ESO's who invest heavily in good governance and have a quality-driven approach embedded into their operations would also benefit. Currently, any registered ESO can apply for funding and, based on a good application, receive it. This creates inequity because those who are investing the most amount of time and human resources into quality service provision may not be the ones receiving the funding.

The most profound benefit for government would be reduction in costs. If service providers were working in partnership with government to deliver services in a manner that meets a quality framework, there would be a decrease in time spent managing issues arising from questionable quality. The time and resources saved would be better invested into activities and research that further benefits recipients.

Draft Recommendation 16.1 states,

*"The Department of Veterans' Affairs should develop outcomes and performance frameworks that provide robust measures of the effectiveness of services"*.

Further, Draft Recommendation 16.2 states,

*"The Department of Veterans' Affairs should conduct more high-quality trials and reviews of its services and policies for veterans and their families"*.

The implementation of quality indicators would go a long way toward assisting government to realise draft recommendations 16.1 and 16.2 because ESOs would be reporting outcomes that provide data to government and further enable the identification of needs and the existence of gaps as well as help predict future needs.

Meeting the needs of those who require services, that are broad and continuously changing, takes collaboration and planning at all levels. Funding is needed to provide meaningful services to recipients, but that funding should come with the understanding that the ESO needs to provide evidence of quality alignment across all areas of their businesses. There has to be oversight and accountability at all levels.

There is a profound lack of research around war widows to enable government, industry and other stakeholders to make informed policy decisions. While a lot of good qualitative and quantitative research about veterans can be accessed, the same cannot be said about war widows. The Draft Report states,

*"The overarching objective of the veteran support system should be to improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families...The strategy should promote access to high-quality mental health care, and facilitate coordinated care for veterans with complex needs (and where relevant, their families)"* -Productivity Commission Draft Report

Given the sacrifice that war widows have made and the devastating repercussions of that sacrifice, it is more than a little disparaging that war widows are mentioned as a bracketed addition, appearing as an after-thought to the needs of veterans. War widows and veterans do not face the same challenges nor should they be grouped under the same banner. War widows are indeed quite unique and face different social, familial, cultural and economic barriers that deserve their own investigations.

War widows carry the stress and emotional burden of coping with life without their main support and as such, can be more vulnerable to depression and anxiety while still trying to meet the demands of dependent family and finances. This is further exacerbated by the increasing prevalence of social isolation. Many war widows, particularly those who are frail-aged, are missing out on the one thing that all humans need: **a sense of purpose that comes from interacting with others and contributing to the community.**

When depression and anxiety are mixed with loneliness, the outcome is a toxic and continuous cycle of poor mental and physical health.

Considering the focus DVA places on veterans, it is not surprising that the general public are largely unaware of the number of war widows in Australia or the scale of the challenges they face. DVA's 2018 'Net Total Persons Receiving Income Support or Compensation from DVA Report' shows that there were 47,928 partner/widow service pensioners and 59,001 war widow pensioners, both with similar personal service support needs. Considering these numbers, it is not difficult to see that war widows are proportionately under-represented in government reform and clearly have the numbers to deserve appropriately funded research that will enable meaningful services for them.

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## RECOMMENDATION

Further research around war widows and their unique needs to enable government and industry to respond meaningfully to their needs.

AWWQ recommends the following:

1. Provision of funding for research to increase knowledge of war widows;
2. Identification of the unique historical and current personal, social, familial and psychological challenges / barriers for war widows;
3. Identification of the historical and current direct and indirect governmental costs of supporting war widow, including the cost of carers allowance to assist family carers who are caring for frail-aged war widows;
4. Identification of the current prevalence and unique causes of social isolation, barriers to employment and cultural barriers for war widows;
5. Identification of the effectiveness of current support mechanisms for the unique needs of war widows;
6. Identification of gaps in current support mechanisms

A lack of research on, and direct recognition of, War Widows, *is* an important issue. Changes to the nature of conflicts and the outcomes for serving men and women, together with social, familial and technological change impacts war widows (both old and young) and will continue do so in the future. In addition to identifying the current needs of war widows, ongoing research will enable government and ESOs with responsibility for service provision to better predict these changing circumstances and needs and give this very important cohort the recognition they have earned.

"When depression and anxiety are mixed with loneliness, the outcome is a toxic and continuous cycle of poor mental and physical health".

## AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS QUEENSLAND

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