



Canberra veterans' symposium a feat of grassroots leadership for wellbeing and advocacy

An important event is underway in Canberra today under the leadership of Ian Lindgren who has established a notable coterie of advocates and thinkers capable of filling the intellectual and strategic void that has existed for decades across the ex-services support sector. The Australian Veteran Community Symposium is an attempt to step-up while major ex-service organisations left floundering and grasping for relevance.

Lindgren's says the initiative was sparked by his frustration of what he sees as the ineffectiveness of DVA's Ex-Services Organisation Round Table (ESORT). The symposium designed to develop and promote strategic policy and to publicly hold DVA to account.

Lindgren has participated in ESORT as a representative of the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association (APPVA) and suggests that DVA is unable to make the internal changes required to fix the systemic issues at the core of the organisation's failures.



Ian Lindgren

Speaking about the need for independent veterans' forum, Lindgren said *"this was something we had to do outside of the conventional veteran community because nothing is changing for veterans"*.

Frustrated by the performance of the ex-service sector and the dysfunction within the advisory groups such as ESORT, Lindgren says that he's witnessed firsthand the dysfunction within.

"Put quite simply; they're failing to represent the veteran community."

According to Lindgren, ESORT is ineffective partly because DVA's terms-of-reference reduce its ability to take on its intended strategic role and prevents it from holding DVA to account for implementing important changes that could make a world difference to veterans and their families

As the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide progresses, it's clear that DVA must be held to account for delivering services to veterans and the veteran community. This requirement also applies to CSC, ATO, DAG, ADF and Treasury to name a few. With such a broad level of accountability required, it's clear that the chair of an important body with the stated intentions of ESORT cannot be from within the very machinery that needs the oversight. Departmental secretaries must be held to account early when they adjust and make meaningful change instead of letting years go by and having it all exposed at a Royal Commission, and after too many have lost their lives.

Lindgren suggests that *"It is important that an independent statutory authority that reports to the Minister and holds departments accountable to deliver services to the veteran community be established as has been done in the US and Canada, following the models that are in place in Australia such as the state anti-corruption bodies."*

The Canberra session of the Australian Veteran Community Symposium is predicated on the understanding that the current veteran compensation and rehabilitation system is not fit-for-purpose and requires fundamental reform. The agenda has been set to:

1. Identify the critical success criteria of well functioning and fit-for-purpose veteran and veteran-family wellbeing system;
2. Create a prioritised list of veteran and veteran family issues that urgently need to be addressed;
3. Develop and evaluate the options for the oversight and governance of the veteran compensation and support systems.

In relation to Government responses to the DVA claims backlog, Lindgren raises concerns that the response of throwing more staff at the problem without changing the system, may simply amplify the failings and distress caused by DVA processes and the perception of a bureaucracy that places process ahead of outcomes. He says,

"It is important that we move away from this idea that 500 additional staff will somehow speed up and fix the claims backlog in a system that's fundamentally broken."

The outcomes of the Australian Veteran Community Symposium will be published on the Australian Veteran Community website; www.australianveterancommunity.com.au It's intended that follow-up symposia will be held in Burnie Tasmania on 6 October 22, and in Brisbane during the week of 11 October 22.

The symposium is an initiative of a veteran family, Ian and Maria Lindgren, who feel that there is no apparent reason for veterans and veteran families to experience what they do as they transition out of the ADF and then attempt to live a happy life. The symposium is totally funded by the Lindgren family for the benefit of veterans, veteran families and the veteran support network such as the medical community.

