



Decision and Statement of reasons issued under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

Decision and reason for decision of Sara (Position Number 62214764)
Information Access Unit, Client Access Rehabilitation Branch, Department of Veterans' Affairs

Applicant: Ms Julie A

Decision date: 26 April 2022

FOI reference number: LEX 48671

Sent by email: foi+request-8623-f7a852f9@righttoknow.org.au

Dear Julie,

Freedom of Information Request: LEX 48671

Decision

1. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (**Department**) has undertaken a reasonable search of its records. I have decided to refuse access to your request, on the basis that relevant documents do not exist.

Authority to make decision

2. I, Sara (Position Number 62214764), Information Access Officer, Information Access Unit, am an officer authorised by the Secretary of the Department to make decisions about access to documents in the possession of the Department in accordance with section 23(1) of the FOI Act.

Summary

3. On 18 March 2022 you made a request for access to documents in the possession of the Department. Your request sought access to:

"...The Dunt Report highlighted that High Needs Case Management Pilot established initially to process MRCA claims in Sydney by Veterans Affairs, where case officers had delegate powers (unlike the current CCS model currently used by Veterans Affairs), proved successful in reducing incidents of

distress and self harm among clients, but was discontinued by Veterans Affairs.

As a majority of veterans complain about Veterans Affairs siloed and disjointed One DVA model, where cases criss-cross the country in their progression of their claims by supposedly specialised areas, instead of a more personal one on one case manager approach as was used in the pilot program it would be useful for our submission to the Royal Commission to look at why Veterans Affairs discontinued such a successful program.

I'd therefore like to get copy of the documents that decide to discontinue that High Needs Case Management Pilot that state the reasons why it was shuttered, in lieu of less effective and more unpopular arrangements, as it doesn't make sense why a more inefficient and ineffective arrangement was preferred by Veterans' Affairs instead.

For background the Dunt report described the program as follows:

The High Needs Case Management Pilot (HNCMP) program operated in 2007 as an initiative of the DVA Sydney Office. It involved only that group of the DVA administering the MRCA scheme (that is to say it operating one of the three Acts). Unlike the CLU, staff members did have delegation powers. Three case managers each took on a caseload of 40 clients with multiple needs, as their single point of contact with DVA. These case managers were very suitable, as they had both DVA assessor background and health care provider experience.

An internal evaluation of the HNCMP was conducted based on Before (32 clients) and After (37 clients) surveys of the client group. It indicated that:

- A good or excellent rating of satisfaction with the level of service of the MRC group increased from 31% to 51%;*
- An excellent rating of experience with staff increased by 30%;*
- A satisfactory or easy rating for accessing information increased from 59.5% to 92%;*
- Overall clients' awareness of services had increased;*
- Nearly half of the clients indicated that their level of service had increased;*
- Many clients still felt that their claims were not dealt with in a timely way;*
- 72% of respondents had only one case manager;*
- The level of complaints against MRCA group in the NSW branch of DVA reduced from 27 to 13 per month.*

While the Dunt report mentions that this successful program was shuttered by Veterans Affairs in 2008 on the sole ground that there were 'concerns about the impact on staff of working' in a direct case manager role approach, this seems strangely illogical given the success of the program and its impact on the Department's clients, that in turn reduced the load on the agency as a whole.

This is especially since the alternate proposal adopted that 'it was proposed that all staff manage all clients according to their needs' has been shown to be wholly ineffective, given those empowered to make decisions are kept quarantined from client engagement.

So there must be something more than just this empty claim as to why a successful program was binned...

4. On 24 March 2022, the Department acknowledged your request via email.
5. On 11 April 2022, the Department sought an extension of time under section 15AA of the FOI Act, on the basis that additional time was required to undertake further searches to identify any documents within the scope of the request.
6. As no reply was received, the Department sought an extension of time under section 15AB of the FOI Act. The Department is awaiting confirmation from the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner regarding this extension. If granted, a decision on your request will be due 18 May 2022.

Material taken into account

7. In accordance with section 26(1)(a) of the FOI Act, my findings on any material question of fact, the material on which those findings were based and the reasons for my decision to refuse access to documents follows.
8. I have taken the following material into account in making my decision.
 - the terms of your request;
 - the types of information and documents that are in the Department's possession;
 - the content of the document that fall within the scope of your request;
 - Sections 3, 11 and 11A of the FOI Act which give the Australian community a legally enforceable right to obtain access to information held by the Government of the Commonwealth. I also considered the following provisions of the FOI Act relevant to my decision:
 - Section 15 Request for Access;
 - Section 24A Requests may be refused if documents cannot be found, do not exist or have not been received;
 - the Guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (**FOI Guidelines**).
9. A full extract of all FOI Act provisions used to make my decision are provided in **Schedule 2**.

Reasons for decision

10. I have decided to **refuse access** to documents within the scope of your request in accordance with the following provision in the FOI Act:

Requests may be refused if documents cannot be found, do not exist or have not been received (section 24A)

11. Section 24A(1) of the FOI Act provides that an agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
- a. all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
 - b. the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
 - i. is in the agency's or Minister's possession but cannot be found or
 - ii. does not exist.
12. Your request seeks a "copy of the documents that decide to discontinue that High Needs Case Management Pilot, that state the reasons why it was shuttered..."
13. I consulted with the following relevant business areas of the Department in relation to your request:
- a. Client Benefits Division;
 - b. Veteran and Family Policy Division;
 - c. Mental Health and Wellbeing Services Division; and
 - d. Integrity, Information and Security Branch.
14. At the conclusion of this search process, no documents were located which meet the terms of your request. On the advice provided by the relevant business areas, I am satisfied that no documents exist in relation to your request.
15. For this reason, I am refusing your request for documents that decide to discontinue the High Needs Case Management Pilot and reasons for its discontinuance in accordance with section 24A(1)(b)(ii) of the FOI Act on the basis that the requested documents do not exist.

Information Publication Scheme

16. The Information Publication Scheme requires the Department to publish information released in response to individual requests made under the FOI Act, except in specified circumstances.

17. I am of the view that details of your request should be made available on the Department's FOI Disclosure Log. As such, details of your request will be published on the Department's FOI Disclosure Log which can be accessed at <http://www.dva.gov.au/about-dva/freedom-information/foi-disclosure-log>. Please note that the Department does not publish details of FOI applicants, it only publishes details of the FOI request and the documents released in response to the request.

Your rights of review

18. If you are dissatisfied with my decision, you may apply for internal review or request the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (**OAIC**) review my decision. We encourage you to seek internal review as a first step to resolve any concerns you may have.

Internal review

19. Under section 54 of the FOI Act, you may apply in writing to the Department for an Internal Review of my decision. The Internal Review application must be made within 30 days of the date of this letter. Where possible please attach reasons why you believe review of the decision is necessary. The internal review will be carried out by another officer within 30 days.
20. You can make your application for Internal Review in one of the following ways:

Post: Information Access Unit,
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998, Brisbane QLD 4001

Email: Information.Access@dva.gov.au

OAIC review

21. Under section 54L of the FOI Act, you may apply to the OAIC to review my decision. An application for review by OAIC must be made in writing within 60 days of the date of this letter, and be lodged in one of the following ways:

Online: www.oaic.gov.au

Post: Director of FOI Dispute Resolution
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

Facsimile: (02) 9284 9666

Phone: 1300 363 992

Email: FOIDR@oaic.gov.au

22. More information about your review rights under the FOI Act is available in Fact Sheet 12 published by the OAIC: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/information-commissioner-review/>

Contact us

23. If you wish to discuss this decision, please do not hesitate to contact the Information Access Unit using the following details:

Online: <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/freedom-information/access-information>

Post: Information Access Unit
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998, Brisbane QLD 4001

Phone: 1800 838 372

Email: Information.Access@dva.gov.au

Yours sincerely,

Sara (Position Number 62214764)

Information Access Officer
Information Access Unit
Client Rehabilitation Access Branch
Department of Veterans' Affairs

26 April 2022



Schedule of relevant provisions in the FOI Act

3 Objects—general

- (1) The objects of this Act are to give the Australian community access to information held by the Government of the Commonwealth by:
 - (a) requiring agencies to publish the information; and
 - (b) providing for a right of access to documents.
- (2) The Parliament intends, by these objects, to promote Australia's representative democracy by contributing towards the following:
 - (a) increasing public participation in Government processes, with a view to promoting better informed decision-making;
 - (b) increasing scrutiny, discussion, comment and review of the Government's activities.
- (3) The Parliament also intends, by these objects, to increase recognition that information held by the Government is to be managed for public purposes, and is a national resource.
- (4) The Parliament also intends that functions and powers given by this Act are to be performed and exercised, as far as possible, to facilitate and promote public access to information, promptly and at the lowest reasonable cost.

11 Right of access

- (1) Subject to this Act, every person has a legally enforceable right to obtain access in accordance with this Act to:
 - (a) a document of an agency, other than an exempt document; or
 - (b) an official document of a Minister, other than an exempt document.
- (2) Subject to this Act, a person's right of access is not affected by:
 - (a) any reasons the person gives for seeking access; or
 - (b) the agency's or Minister's belief as to what are his or her reasons for seeking access.

11A Access to documents on request

Scope

- (1) This section applies if:
 - (a) a request is made by a person, in accordance with subsection 15(2), to an agency or Minister for access to:
 - (i) a document of the agency; or
 - (ii) an official document of the Minister; and
 - (b) any charge that, under the regulations, is required to be paid before access is given has been paid.
- (2) This section applies subject to this Act.
Note: Other provisions of this Act are relevant to decisions about access to documents, for example the following:
 - (a) section 12 (documents otherwise available);
 - (b) section 13 (documents in national institutions);
 - (c) section 15A (personnel records);
 - (d) section 22 (access to edited copies with exempt or irrelevant matter deleted).

Mandatory access—general rule

- (3) The agency or Minister must give the person access to the document in accordance with this Act, subject to this section.

Exemptions and conditional exemptions

- (4) The agency or Minister is not required by this Act to give the person access to the document at a particular time if, at that time, the document is an exempt document.

Note: Access may be given to an exempt document apart from under this Act, whether or not in response to a request (see section 3A (objects—information or documents otherwise accessible)).

- (5) The agency or Minister must give the person access to the document if it is conditionally exempt at a particular time unless (in the circumstances) access to the document at that time would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest.

Note 1: Division 3 of Part IV provides for when a document is conditionally exempt.

Note 2: A conditionally exempt document is an exempt document if access to the document would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest (see section 31B (exempt documents for the purposes of Part IV)).

Note 3: Section 11B deals with when it is contrary to the public interest to give a person access to the document.

- (6) Despite subsection (5), the agency or Minister is not required to give access to the document at a particular time if, at that time, the document is both:
- (a) a conditionally exempt document; and
 - (b) an exempt document:
 - (i) under Division 2 of Part IV (exemptions); or
 - (ii) within the meaning of paragraph (b) or (c) of the definition of exempt document in subsection 4(1).

15 Requests for access (as related to the requirements for requests)

Persons may request access

- (1) Subject to section 15A, a person who wishes to obtain access to a document of an agency or an official document of a Minister may request access to the document.

Requirements for request

- (2) The request must:
- (a) be in writing; and
 - (aa) state that the request is an application for the purposes of this Act; and
 - (b) provide such information concerning the document as is reasonably necessary to enable a responsible officer of the agency, or the Minister, to identify it; and
 - (c) give details of how notices under this Act may be sent to the applicant (for example, by providing an electronic address to which notices may be sent by electronic communication).
- (2A) The request must be sent to the agency or Minister. The request may be sent in any of the following ways:
- (a) delivery to an officer of the agency, or a member of the staff of the Minister, at the address of any central or regional office of the agency or Minister specified in a current telephone directory;
 - (b) postage by pre-paid post to an address mentioned in paragraph (a);
 - (c) sending by electronic communication to an electronic address specified by the agency or Minister.

23 Decisions to be made by authorised persons

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), a decision in respect of a request made to an agency may be made, on behalf of the agency, by the responsible Minister or the principal officer of the agency or, subject to the regulations, by an officer of the agency acting within the scope of authority exercisable by him or her in accordance with arrangements approved by the responsible Minister or the principal officer of the agency.

- (2) A decision in respect of a request made to a court, or made to a tribunal, authority or body that is specified in Schedule 1, may be made on behalf of that court, tribunal, authority or body by the principal officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body or, subject to the regulations, by an officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body acting within the scope of authority exercisable by him or her in accordance with arrangements approved by the principal officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body.

24A Requests may be refused if documents cannot be found, do not exist or have not been received

Document lost or non-existent

- (1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
- (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
 - (b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
 - (i) is in the agency's or Minister's possession but cannot be found; or
 - (ii) does not exist.

Document not received as required by contract

- (2) An agency may refuse a request for access to a document if:
- (a) in order to comply with section 6C, the agency has taken contractual measures to ensure that it receives the document; and
 - (b) the agency has not received the document; and
 - (c) the agency has taken all reasonable steps to receive the document in accordance with those contractual measures.

26 Reasons and other particulars of decisions to be given

- (1) Where, in relation to a request, a decision is made relating to a refusal to grant access to a document in accordance with the request or deferring provision of access to a document, the decision-maker shall cause the applicant to be given notice in writing of the decision, and the notice shall:
- (a) state the findings on any material questions of fact, referring to the material on which those findings were based, and state the reasons for the decision; and
 - (aa) in the case of a decision to refuse to give access to a conditionally exempt document—include in those reasons the public interest factors taken into account in making the decision; and

Note: Access must generally be given to a conditionally exempt document unless it would be contrary to the public interest (see section 11A).

- (b) where the decision relates to a document of an agency, state the name and designation of the person giving the decision; and
 - (c) give to the applicant appropriate information concerning:
 - (i) his or her rights with respect to review of the decision;
 - (ii) his or her rights to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner in relation to the decision; and
 - (iii) the procedure for the exercise of the rights referred to in subparagraphs (i) and (ii); including (where applicable) particulars of the manner in which an application for internal review (Part VI) and IC review (Part VII) may be made.
- (1A) Section 13 of the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977 does not apply to a decision referred to in subsection (1).
- (2) A notice under this section is not required to contain any matter that is of such a nature that its inclusion in a document of an agency would cause that document to be an exempt document. (see section 11A).