

Waikato Veterans' Forum 26/27 February 2026



PERFORMANCE REPORT

PREPARED BY

THE RANFURLY VETERANS' TRUST

April 2026

The Ranfurly Veterans' Trust and Veterans' Affairs New Zealand worked in partnership with multiple organisations to bring together veteran-focused groups and New Zealand veterans and their whānau from around the Waikato region. The event centered on connection, rehabilitation, and the overall wellbeing of veterans and their whānau.

The Waikato Veterans' Forum was held on **26/27 February 2026** at the **Claudlands Event Centre** and provided:

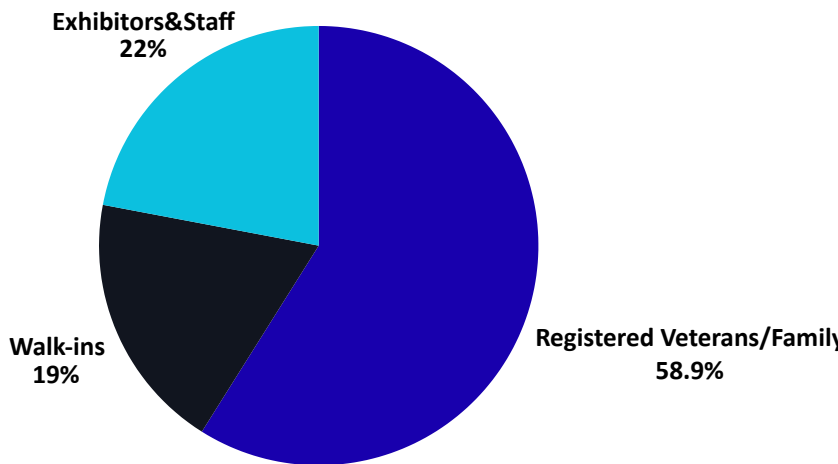
- An opportunity for ex-service members/veterans and their families to reunite, connect and engage with fellow ex-service members.
- Access to 23 organisations offering support and assistance in areas such as finance, advocacy, camaraderie, health and wellbeing.



- One-on-one meetings in person between veterans and Veterans' Affairs staff on the day.
- Access to private consultations with staff from the NZDF's Force Financial Hub to discuss wills, finance, and insurance.
- Access to rongoā services provided by ĀKI Innovations
- Funded equipment for ex-service members/veterans to aid with activities of daily living (ILS).
- Presentations from 5 organisations: Veterans' Affairs, NZDF Force Financial Hub, RNZRSA, and Vietnam Veterans Children and Grandchildren Trust
- A video message from the Minister for Veterans, Hon Chris Penk.
- An evening event the night before for those who couldn't attend the daytime event to meet with VA staff and selected providers.

336

TOTAL ATTENDANCE AT THE WAIKATO VETERANS' FORUM



VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES

Registration was open to anyone who has served or is still serving in the New Zealand Defence Force, also to family members. At this forum, an evening event was trialled to take place the night before the main event. This created an opportunity for veterans who could not make the day time event to be able meet with a VA staff member. This proved to be a popular decision, with Richard Adams doing a presentation on his work with Taskforce Kiwi. 22 veterans and/or family members attended this event.

Thursday Evening Event Attendance

- 22 Veterans pre-registered on Eventbrite
- 5 Family members pre-registered on Eventbrite
- 17 Veterans actually attended
- 1 Family members actually attended
- 4 Walk-ins
- 22 Total number attended**
- 10 Seen by a Case Manager

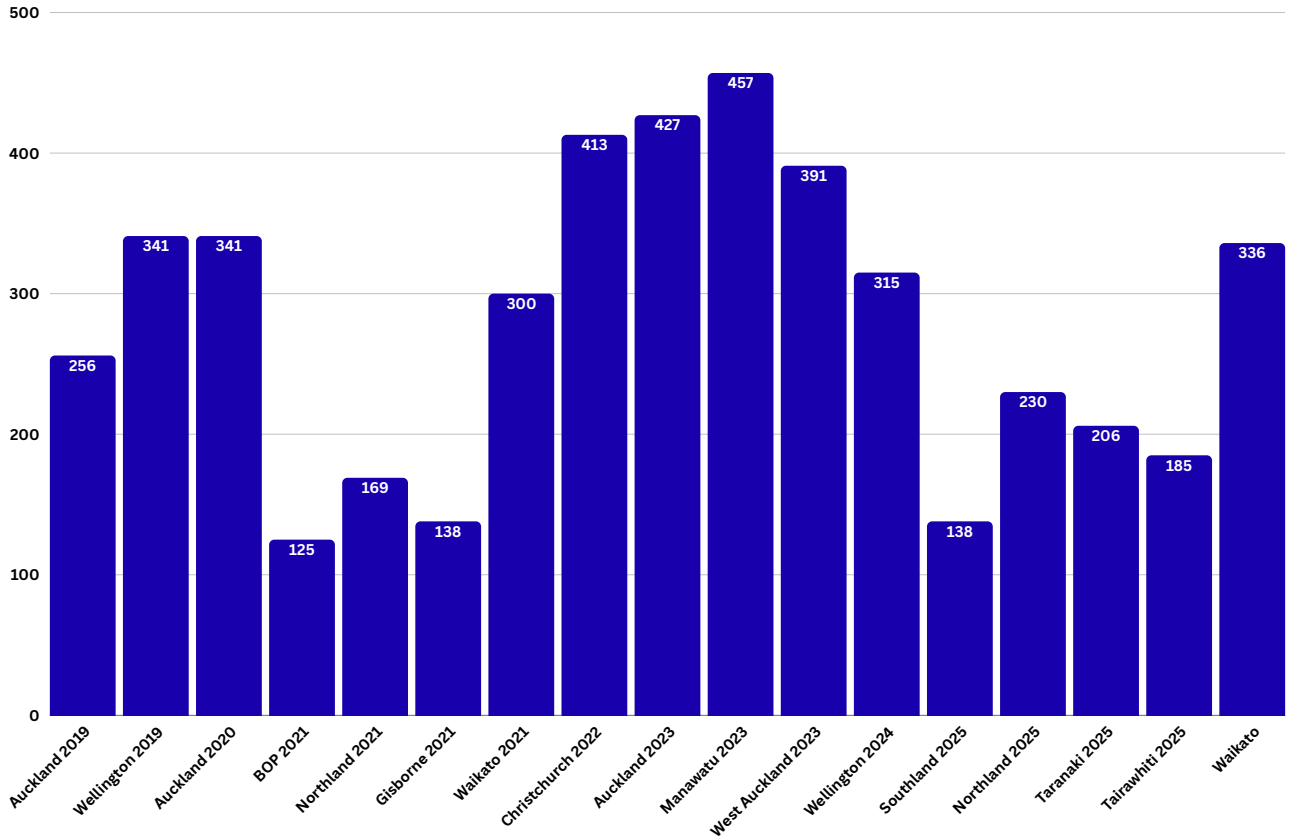
Friday Main Event Attendance

- 152 Veterans pre-registered on Eventbrite
- 62 Family members pre-registered on Eventbrite
- 132 Veterans actually attended
- 48 Family members actually attended
- 60 Walk-ins
- 240 Total number attended**
- 140 Seen by a Case Manager (approx)



EXHIBITORS & STAFF

There were 23 organisations in attendance, with a total of 74 staff who were available for the attendees and their families on the day.



HOW MUCH WAS ACHIEVED? PARTICIPATION

Report from ĀKI Innovations on Rongoā Services



Purpose

ĀKI Innovations was invited to provide rongoā services at the Veterans Affairs Forum held in Kirikiriroa Hamilton on Friday 27 February. The primary objective was to offer attendees an opportunity to engage in mirimiri, a traditional Māori form of healing. Sessions were scheduled for 20 minutes each, delivered by an experienced Māori male practitioner, Mihaka Hohua. Complementary to mirimiri, taonga pūoro (including pūtōrino, koauau, poiāwhioawhio, purerehua, and pōngaihu) were also played by ĀKI Manukura, Marlana Maru, to support the attendees' mauri and wairua.

Venue & Logistics

Privacy: The assigned area was private, which was beneficial for attendees seeking mirimiri without feeling 'exposed'.

Location/Signage: The location behind the station of VA services tables made the service somewhat challenging to identify, as ĀKI Innovations did not have its usual signage. However, the VA staff and other stall holders such as NeuroConnect, were excellent at directing people to the service location.

Experience with the VA Team

The interaction with the VA Team was overwhelmingly positive. A strong sense of community and manaakitanga was displayed by all kaimahi (staff members) towards ĀKI Innovations and the rongoā offering throughout the day. Staff provided water and food and invited the practitioner to use the coffee and kai stations. This was also experienced in the lead up to the event with excellent communication and coordination efforts from Tama Andrew.

Two staff members from the rehabilitation team expressed genuine interest in rongoā and its potential to support Veterans. They indicated they would be seeking to establish more networks with rongoā providers nationally, including those based in Wellington. One staff member made a concerted effort to raise awareness of the mirimiri offering and gently encouraged a couple of attendees to sign up for a session.

Report from ĀKI Innovations on Rongoā Services



Sessions Held

A total of five event attendees accessed the mirimiri services, consisting of one female and four males. Positive feedback was provided by all attendees.

Narratives / observations

One wahine Māori, whose husband is 'ex-navy', reported feeling relieved after the mirimiri session. She also commented positively on hearing the taonga pūoro.

One tane Māori stated this was his first mirimiri experience and advised he would be accessing more in the future. He explained he had been involved in a serious accident approximately 18 months prior, was not accessing any ACC-funded rehabilitation, and was awaiting surgery. Advice was offered regarding potential avenues to ease his ongoing discomfort. He too commented on hearing a koauau being played and that it was peaceful, and that it helped take his mind off the physical aspect of the session.

One male of NZ Pākehā descent became emotional, stating, "the moment I walked in, I knew I was meant to be here." He reported feeling like he wanted to "give up", referring to physical ailments that were hindering his independence. He left much more positive and uplifted.

In addition to the five sessions, Mihaka engaged in kōrero (conversation) with other attendees which supported social connectedness.

Overall Conclusion

ĀKI Innovations received positive feedback from every attendee. We believe the on-site provision of rongoā (mirimiri) was a beneficial addition to the Veterans Affairs Forum.

Feedback from 55 Ex-service Members/Veterans

The feedback from the ex-service members and families was positive. The following feedback was recorded:

**81%
YES**

Was the event relevant to you?

**89%
YES**

Was it easy to find the information you were after?



Overall, the majority of attendees found the forum relevant, the information was relatively easy to find, and the information they received answered their questions.

The main reason for talking to VA was to get general information about VA and to discuss entitlements and VIP services. 74.5% of respondents found the process of seeing a Case Manager easy.

HOW WELL WAS IT DONE? FEEDBACK

What interested you most about this event?

25.4%	POTENTIAL SUPPORT
20.0%	MEETING A CASE MANAGER
16.3%	LEARNING MORE ABOUT VA
12.7%	OTHER
9.0%	CATCHING UP WITH OLD FRIENDS
9.0%	HEARING THE PRESENTATIONS
5.4%	MEETING THE OTHER ORGANISATIONS



Veterans at the forum prioritised getting support, connecting with a case manager and learning more about Veterans' Affairs (VA). It was also clear that it was important for veterans in the Waikato region to hear the presentations and meet up with old friends.

51% of respondents heard about the event through the emailed VA newsletter, 18% via the VA website and 11% each through Facebook or from a friend or colleague. Two of the respondents were not previously VA clients.

HOW WELL WAS IT DONE? FEEDBACK

Feedback from 11 Exhibitors

Overall Evaluation of the forum



EXCELLENT

How organized was the forum?



100%

How do you rate the venue



90%

Would you attend another forum if the opportunity arose?



100% YES



Exhibitors -What did you like about the forum?

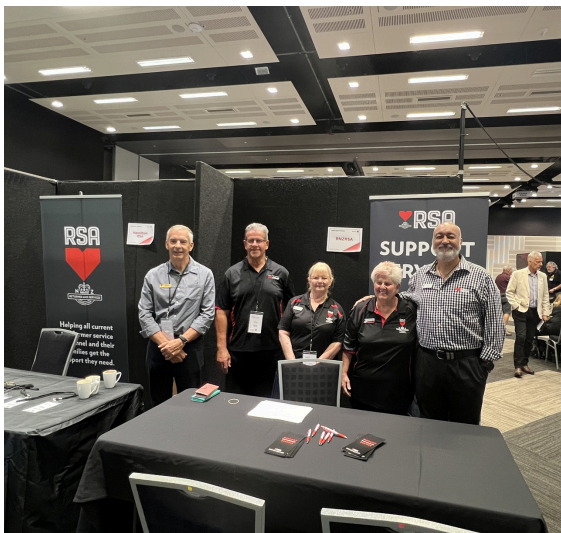
- Great set up, great people
- I didn't get a chance to see everyone as I was run off my feet with people queuing to see me
- Great organisation. Great treatment of guests and exhibitors.
- Like, meeting old mates, meeting new mates. Great staff all round
- Great set-up and support for vendors and space/layout was great for the veterans to access at own pace. It was great to talk with the veterans about their needs and how we might be able to assist.
- Well publicised with a very good turnout. Evening session was worthwhile.
- Variety of different providers and people attending. Chance to share our mahi and connect with other like minded people.
- Lovely staff and veterans made the experience great.
- Enjoyed the forum - it was great to be able to speak to people in person and give them information and advice as to their personal circumstances. We came back with some leads to follow up on.
- Well organised, good venue, good veterans' attendance, very busy for our artillery assoc stall which was great.
- It was well advertised, I would have like to have seen more associated veteran organisations there. Good parking and facilities available



Exhibitors Feedback & Recommendations

General comments

- Great organization
- The programme before the forum was great
- It was great to have the rehab advisors come and talk to us prior so we knew more about the processes for veterans accessing inputs and support.
- I question the timing and location of the presentation. That could have been done elsewhere.
- Information provided was very good and of the right quantity
- Thank you for inviting us. It was great to speak with many veterans and help improve their awareness of ear health.
- The event was well organised and received. Appreciated that there were refreshments available
- At times it was hard to hear due to the announcements and background noise.
- I went and listened to some of the speakers and was very hard to hear them as it was very noisy and some of the veterans/visitors also commented on this



Key Insights and recommendations

- Love to see you in Manukau again.
- Always a pleasure to work with the Ranfurly Trust and VANZ on the delivery of the expos. Particularly worthwhile when there is a good turnout.
- Look forward to attending future events when they are in Hamilton.
- Great day, it would be good to see more although I realise it is a matter of resources

PARTICIPATING EXHIBITORS



THE RANFURLY VETERANS' TRUST



resonate.

FORCE 4 FAMILIES



become REDEFINING WEALTH

