Te Tira Ahu Ika A Whiro
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
New Zealand



BRIEFING TO THE INCOMING MINISTER FOR VETERANS

Presented to the Hon Paul Goldsmith
14 August 2026

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Introduction

Welcome to the Veterans portfolio.

We look forward to working with you to support many of the 42,000 veterans in New Zealand.

Men and women in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) commit years of their lives to serving New Zealand, away from their families, and at great personal sacrifice.

Veterans and their families face unique experiences. Military life can involve significant challenges, not least the exposure to life and death situations.

Veterans serve in New Zealand and overseas. In recent years our people have served and still serve exceptionally in places like the Sinai, Somalia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Iraq, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, and Afghanistan.

Many people complete their full careers in NZDF; others leave and adjust to new careers in civilian life. Many veterans may develop health issues that have resulted from their service.

New Zealand has an obligation to recognise and value the contribution of veterans. This is done through their eligibility for support, rehabilitation programmes and health services; through formal recognition of service; and through commemoration activities.

Veterans need and value the services provided by Government. However, there are challenges in continuing to providing efficient and effective levels of service. Over the next few years we can expect an influx of veterans who have served in recent conflicts to apply for support. We need to plan for an increasing number of applications and for an increased complexity in the applications.

Additionally, we are reliant on medical and health professionals for their knowledge, to guide our decision-making processes, and to provide the relevant services to veterans. With an ageing population, demand for health services will continue to rise and putting pressure on our ability to provide veterans the right support, when they need it.

The Government manages our legislative framework and allocates appropriate resourcing to support veterans now, and in the future, so we can continue to honour their service.

This document is structured into four parts.

- Part 1: Veterans' Affairs agency information
- Part 2: Your responsibilities as Minister for Veterans
- Part 3: Strategic Issues
- Appendices 1-4: Background reference information

We look forward to working with you to honour and respect veterans, whilst supporting you and the Government of New Zealand discharging your responsibilities.

Part 1 - Introduction to Veterans' Affairs

Veterans' Affairs New Zealand (VA) provides support for those former military personnel and their families who are eligible for services under the Veterans' Support Act 2014.

VA is a unit of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), and part of the NZDF's People Capability Portfolio. Unlike the rest of the NZDF, it operates under the Veterans' Support Act 2014, rather than the Defence Act. The Chief of Defence Force delegates responsibility for the efficient administration of this legislation directly to the Head of VA. The Act also allocates some specific statutory responsibilities to the Head of VA — including the authority to determine individual claims for entitlements, services, and support.

This brief is an introduction to your portfolio, your ministerial responsibilities and key upcoming work. It also covers some of the challenges and the opportunities we see within the portfolio.

The Veterans' Support Act 2014

The Veterans' Support Act 2014 (VSA2014) defines VA's responsibility for those who have served in the military. This responsibility does not cover everyone who has ever served, but rather a sub-group who meet the definition of "veteran" in the VSA2014 (further discussed below and on page 19) and who are therefore eligible for entitlements under the legislation.

The Act came into operation in December 2015. It replaced the outdated and limited War Pensions Act 1954, and provided a more modern and appropriate way of supporting those who had been affected by their service in New Zealand's armed forces. The legislation emphasises rehabilitation, and specifies the entitlements that veterans are eligible for if they are injured or become ill as a result of their service.

The Act included a requirement that its operation be reviewed after two years, and Professor Ron Paterson was appointed to do this review in 2017. In response to his report, VA has made changes to its policies and procedures. Changes have also been made to the VSA2014 under which VA operates, with amendment legislation coming into effect on 1 October 2020.

Two recent High Court judgements on a particular veteran's case have implications for the implementation of the VSA2014 for complex medical issues and how these are shown to relate to service. s.9(2)(g)(i)

Our veteran clients

There are two sub-groups of former service personnel who are legally defined as veterans, and entitled to cover under New Zealand's veteran legislation.

Those who served in the armed forces in any capacity before 1 April 1974 have "**qualifying routine service"**. This date marks the introduction of the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) in New Zealand. As workplace injuries were not covered before ACC came into operation, the Act provides that anyone who served in the military before this date, in any capacity, would be covered by the State if they had been injured or made ill by their service.

The second sub-group of clients is made up of those who have "**qualifying operational service**" (as defined in Section 9 of the VSA2014). These are men and women who served New Zealand at a time of war, or in operations overseas which have posed a significant risk of harm to those deployed.

From 1 April 1974, only personnel who have qualifying operational service are eligible for support from Veterans' Affairs. This is because, from this date, all routine workplace injuries are covered by ACC, so there is no requirement for the VSA2014 to provide this cover.

The average age of our clients is 80, and many were veterans of the Second World War, the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, and the conflict in Vietnam. That situation is changing; the older veterans are decreasing in number, and those who have undertaken operational service since 1974 are becoming more numerous.

These "post-Vietnam" veterans have had different experiences, and have different needs, compared to the older veterans. They are likely to have served in a number of deployments during their career, and they come to us with more complex health issues. Because many still have years of active life ahead of them, the support that this group receives focuses on rehabilitation and independence. A rehabilitation strategy has been developed to address these needs. An increasing number of younger veterans are taking advantage of this, as we work to increase the awareness of this group about the services, support, and entitlements we can provide to them.

The number of personnel likely to be eligible for VA services is estimated at around 42,000. Many have no need of assistance from VA. We would only expect them to contact us if they developed a condition arising from their qualifying service. Over 25,000 clients are registered with VA, with around 10,000 of these receiving payments, and more than 6,500 requiring ongoing support, and being case managed.

VA supports its case management approach with several communications activities including regular outreach forums, an e-newsletter, an online magazine, and regular updates on social media platforms.

Our staff

We have a staff establishment of 129. The majority are client-facing (including case managers, rehabilitation advisers, a team that makes decisions on applications, a group that arranges payments of entitlements, and telephone enquiry staff). They are supported by small corporate, policy, clinical and communications teams.

Our strategic focus

VA has four areas for strategic focus:

- honouring the service of veterans, including enhancing services and support, and supporting commemorations;
- creating strong foundations for delivery, including identifying service improvements and emerging client needs;
- generating a sustainable workforce to deliver excellent client service; and
- partnering for greater effect—with other New Zealand government agencies, veterans' organisations, and international partners.

The work that we do

Case management and processing applications

More than 6,500 veterans are being case-managed. This involves proactively keeping in regular touch with them, and ensuring they receive the support and services they are entitled to. The VSA2014 sets out what entitlements are available to eligible veterans who have been injured or made ill as a result of their service. VA staff process applications, make decisions on compensation or services, calculate reimbursements, and make payments to veterans.

Administration of the Veterans' Independence Programme (VIP services)

This programme, which is delivered nationwide under Master Service Agreements, is designed to help veterans stay safe and independent in their own homes. When a need is identified, veterans can access a range of services, at no charge, including help with mowing their lawns, doing their gardens, housework, and personal care. The programme also includes washing down houses and driveways, security alarms, podiatry, and making home alterations to increase accessibility.

This service is an entitlement for veterans who have an accepted service-related illness or injury. It is discretionary for those who receive no other support or services from VA, however, once a Veteran turns 80 years of age, they can receive this service without discretion. An increase in the number of veterans using this service had an impact on staffing resources. As a result we have worked with veteran support and advocacy groups to ensure that the service is more closely targeted to need.

Developing policy advice on and for the veteran sector

As well as providing policy advice to you directly, we provide advice to other agencies and departments on matters relating to veterans. Recent examples have included advice to ACC and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on proposed changes to their legislation, joint work with MBIE on a response for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, and work with the Ministry of Social Development to review and adjust benefit and pension rates. We also work closely with our international partners, including our Five Eyes partners, to develop research and veteran policy.

We regularly make comment on Ministry of Social Development (MSD) policy proposals when these could impact on veterans. We have advocated for a veteran question to be added to the census to help establish a baseline number of potential clients, and are currently working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to explore having a unique identifier for veterans included in medical records.

Work with non-government organisations that represent veterans

VA has regular contact with more than 20 veteran support and advocacy groups across New Zealand. These groups range from those with a very narrow membership (such as regimental associations) to those that offer services to everyone who has served, both in New Zealand and in other Commonwealth countries and in some first responder groups; and members of their families.

The most significant organisation with which VA liaises is the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RNZRSA). We administer a Government grant to the RNZRSA (which this year will total $250,000 + GST).

The RNZRSA is required to report each year on how it has used the Government grant it receives. The most recent of these reports was passed to the office of the Minister for Veterans in January 2026.

s. 9(2)(g)(i)

VA also has a close relationship with the Vietnam Veterans' Association and meets formally twice each year with the Association to discuss the Crown's Memorandum of Understanding with Vietnam veterans (described on page 12) to ensure it remains a living document.

Veteran support partners are our "eyes and ears" in the community, and we place a lot of store on working closely with them. Our partners are able to bring veterans to VA who might not otherwise access our services; and they're able to explain what Veterans' Affairs can offer and how it can help, should veterans

find the system confusing or be reluctant to use it. We are increasingly consulting with these groups on work we are doing that is expected to have an impact on veterans.

Maintenance of 183 Services Cemeteries

These cemeteries, located throughout New Zealand, are places where people with specified operational service and their spouse or partner can be buried. We work with local authorities, and provide grants to make sure the cemeteries are well-kept and honour those who are buried there. VA also covers the costs of plaques and headstones for eligible veterans who are interred in Services Cemeteries, and contributes to the cost of these if a veteran is buried elsewhere.

Work with other Government agencies

We work operationally with a number of Government agencies, including:

- MSD, which administers the Veteran's Pension on our behalf;
- ACC, which provides entitlements, services, and support to veterans;
- MOH, on veteran health issues, including treatment and health practitioner guidelines;
- Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH) on services cemetery matters; and that Ministry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), on offshore commemorations of military significance;
- Inland Revenue, with whom we have an information-sharing agreement that enables us to quickly set levels for veterans' compensation payments;
- Department of Corrections, with which we are working to support imprisoned veterans once they have completed their sentences, and those who are already on VA rehabilitation plans at the time of their sentencing; and
- Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) on domestic commemorations of military significance. We have worked with DIA on the implementation of an Approved Information Sharing Agreement (AISA), to ensure veteran support is not delayed by difficulties in obtaining key records and verifications, and to ensure there is timely notice of change to veterans status and entitlements. We used the transfer of information to audit our client database and improve information quality. Regular exchange of this information will also mean we can act more quickly to offer and set up services to families on the death of a veteran.

Communications and engagement with veteran clients

Communicating with our veteran clients is important and we operate a variety of communications channels to suit the different preferences within the veteran community. Some like to talk with us face-to-face or by phone, through regular interaction with their case managers, or at forums or expos in the community. Some prefer to deal with us in writing, through letters or emails. In recent years, we have held a number of virtual forums, which enable us to interact safely and regularly with our clients. Some of these events have been directed to the significant number of New Zealand veterans who live in Australia and access our services from there. We have a Facebook page, and this is particularly popular with male veterans in the 45–54 age group.

Entitlement information and operational policies are published on the VA website. Other important papers that veterans can access there include:

- the *Veteran Rehabilitation Strategy;*
- *Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau* (the Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework;
- documents that summarise progress in addressing the undertakings that the Crown made to Vietnam veterans in 2006; and
- summaries of the progress made in actioning recommendations of the 2018 Paterson Review of the operation of the VSA2014.

Veterans can use an online eligibility checker tool on the website to confirm whether they may be eligible for assistance.

Particular areas of interest

The definition of a veteran

The current legal definition of “veteran” in New Zealand is more limited than the use of the term in everyday language. Only a proportion of those who have served in the New Zealand armed forces are “veterans” as defined by the VSA2014. The definition, and the associated legal entitlements, apply only to those who served before the advent of the ACC in New Zealand (1 April 1974) or who have taken part in qualifying operational deployments since then. Not all NZDF personnel have undertaken such service.

The intent of the definition is that it enables support and compensation to be targeted to those who have developed illnesses or injuries from having been put at risk in the service of their country, rather than simply recognising attestation in the armed forces.

The definition also has linkage to ACC coverage, and therefore policy decisions have to consider wider Government frameworks.

The reasons behind the limited nature of the definition, however, are not always well understood, and the situation is often interpreted as unfair and discriminatory. A call for an extension of the definition of “veteran” to include everyone who has ever served is frequently made by members of the service and ex-service community. One such call was made by the independent Veterans’ Advisory Board in a report to a previous Minister for Veterans in 2019.

The Veterans' Recognition Bill (2025) is a proposed law to provide symbolic recognition to former NZDF personnel. It does not change any veteran support entitlements but it broadens the definition of "veteran" to include those with medallic recognition, while establishing a military covenant between the Crown, community, and veterans.

The proposed bill introduces a broader definition of 'veteran' separate from the existing VSA2014, and includes all former NZDF personnel who have received any of the following medals or awards:

- the New Zealand Defence Service Medal, which recognises NZDF service of at least three years, including reserve force personnel
- operational service or campaign medals
- honours or decorations awarded through the royal honours system
- medals for bravery or excellence awarded by the New Zealand government.

The proposed bill includes a covenant, or kawenata, which would formalise the relationship between the Government and veterans, and act as a national promise to treat veterans with respect and dignity.

As part of the bill, there are plans to establish a national day dedicated to honouring New Zealand's veterans. This would not be a statutory public holiday. The date will be chosen following consultation with the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RNZRSA) and the independent Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB).

A possible military Covenant/Kawenata

A previous Minister for Veterans asked the VAB to canvas the views of New Zealanders about the possibility of establishing a covenant or kawenata between those who have served in the NZDF, and the Government and people of New Zealand. The intention of such a covenant would be to formalise undertakings by the Government and citizens to those who have served and their families. Australia and the UK have introduced covenants.

The VAB sought submissions on this topic. Because their examination of the issue coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown, the consultation was conducted through representative and online surveys. The completed research indicated that, while the public does not have a lot of knowledge about service people and their lives, New Zealanders feel that there is a moral obligation for the country to recognise service people and their families.

The report concluded that a military covenant could benefit service people and their whānau, and that it is supported by the majority of New Zealanders.

The VAB has subsequently done some further work on recognition generally, and how a covenant might be able to work in New Zealand.

The proposed Veterans' Recognition Bill (2025) includes a covenant, which would formalise the relationship between the Government and veterans, and act as a national promise to treat veterans with respect and dignity.

Should such a covenant go ahead, it would cover all who have served, at any time, not simply those veterans who have entitlements with VA. Work in this area would therefore need to be done within the wider NZDF (or Ministry of Defence) rather than by VA.

Data and information

There is limited data available about New Zealand's veteran population and, in particular, those vulnerable service personnel who could become clients in the future. This has an impact not only on departmental planning, but also on research work.

We continue to build evidence to help us effectively identify and address veterans' needs. We work closely with Stats NZ about adding information about veterans into the integrated data infrastructure (IDI), and with the Ministry of Health on the collection of veteran data. The resulting data and insights should help to develop a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing outcomes for veterans.

VA is working to improve the quality and completeness of veteran data to better identify and support those eligible for assistance under the VSA2014. Since 2025, VA has received information directly from the NZDF when serving personnel undertake qualifying operational service. Personnel identified as having qualifying operational service are automatically registered with VA and provided information about available support and entitlements, helping connect veterans with assistance earlier and ensuring more timely and complete records. In addition, the NZDF has identified personnel who undertook qualifying operational service between 2014 and 2024, and this data is expected to be imported into VA's client management system over the next six months, following substantial cross-matching against existing records.

Despite these improvements, the veteran cohort spans many decades, including veterans whose service dates back to the Second World War. As a result of the passage of time and changes in record-keeping practices, it is not feasible to create a single, fully comprehensive national veteran database. To address historical data gaps, VA continues to undertake outreach activities aimed at engaging veterans who have not previously been registered. As at 1 July 2026, approximately 25,000 veterans and other clients were registered with VA, compared with an estimated veteran population of around 45,000 potentially eligible veterans. Ongoing data-sharing arrangements with the NZDF will ensure that newly eligible veterans are identified and registered more consistently in the future, while outreach efforts continue to improve understanding of the wider veteran population.

Client Management IT Replacement Programme

s. 9(2)(f)(iv) The project is multi-year, with the implementation go-live of the new system anticipated in 2028. The investment will provide a modern, sustainable platform that improves service delivery, strengthens financial stewardship and risk management, supports legislative compliance, and enables VA to meet current and future service demands without increasing staffing requirements. The programme will also reduce the operational risks associated with reliance on legacy technology.

Transitioning from the NZDF to Veterans' Affairs

Leaving service can be challenging. We work closely with NZDF to make sure eligible service personnel who have been identified as having urgent needs, including service-related illnesses or injuries managed by NZDF medical staff, can receive support from VA.

Work is underway, in conjunction with the People and Health portfolios in NZDF, to make the transition as smooth and user-friendly as possible. This includes improving portability of key data about the overall veteran population, so we can make evidence-based decisions about their needs now and in the future. This will also help us plan our future resourcing and workforce plans.

Waitangi Tribunal Kaupapa inquiry

Kaupapa inquiries deal with nationally significant issues affecting Māori as a whole. The Waitangi Tribunal Wai 2500 Military Veterans Kaupapa Inquiry was initiated in September 2014. The Inquiry will hear claims involving past Māori military service undertaken directly for, or on behalf of, the Crown in right of New Zealand or, in colonial times, the Imperial Crown.

The initial phase of the inquiry consisted of six weeks of taonga tuku iho hearings, which were held in 2015 and 2016. Following those hearings, the Tribunal commissioned research into specific topics. The reports on these topics were produced and filed between 2016 and 2020. In June 2020, the Tribunal was satisfied that the evidential coverage was sufficient and directed claimants to file final statements of claim.

A Cabinet paper on the Crown's approach to the Waitangi Tribunal Wai 2500 Māori Military Veterans Kaupapa Inquiry was considered by the Cabinet Māori Crown Relations – Te Arawhiti Committee on 28 June 2022. In addition to approving the Crown's approach, and the necessary appropriation for the Inquiry, the Committee "invited the Minister of Defence and the Minister for Veterans to report back to Cabinet on any proposed Treaty breach concessions and non-breach acknowledgements prior to these being made". On 4 July 2022, Cabinet confirmed that decision, deciding in line with Cabinet Office Circular CO (19) 3, Better Coordination of Contemporary Treaty of Waitangi Issues guidance, that the Crown's approach will include continuously reviewing the evidence and submissions for the purposes of determining whether or not the Crown should make concessions and non-breach acknowledgements.

The Tribunal issued its Statement of Issues on 14 December 2022. Following its first hearing in Rotorua in June 2023, there have been hearings in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Representatives from VA attended these hearings.

Issues raised by claimants include discrimination, recognition, disproportionate risk of harm, inadequate care and rehabilitation, land alienation, farm settlement and economic opportunity, welfare and entitlements, and cultural practices. Many of the claims relate to service generally, and involve the relationship of personnel in service with the NZDF. However, the Tribunal has included within the Statement of Issues, recent Crown policy and practice in relation to concerns raised by Māori veterans and their whānau.

Appropriation – long term liability funding approach

Historically, veterans' support entitlements administered under the VSA2014 were recognised as expenses as each payment fell due. In 2019 the External Reporting Board (which sets accounting standards for New Zealand organisations) issued a standard which meant employee benefits needed to be recorded in a different way.

The change meant that, instead of making provision for expenditure in the year that payments fall due, provision needs to be made for the full payment (i.e. for as long as the employee will be eligible for it) at the point when a person first becomes eligible for that payment. This has had an impact on payments to veterans who are covered by the VSA2014, as veterans are former employees of the NZDF for whom the Government has ongoing support obligations.

This means that when any recommended policy change would affect veterans' entitlements, this needs to be costed, not only across the forecast Budget period, but rather the liability for making payments over a period of 80 years. We will ensure that these costings are included in any advice we provide to you that relates to an extension of entitlements, and any papers that we prepare for you to take to Cabinet on these matters.

s. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Progressing Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau (Te Arataki)

In 2022 VA published the *Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework - Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau (*Te Arataki).

This policy framework provides information and guidance on how to improve the wellbeing of our military veterans, their families and whānau. Its purpose was to educate a wide range of organisations and individuals, and guide their activities to improve the mental health and wellbeing of veterans, their families and whānau; and suggests effective responses and priority areas.

Most of New Zealand's veterans will experience good mental health and make a successful and safe transition into civilian society. However, a small number will face mental health and addiction challenges and be at risk of a range of poor outcomes.

This framework draws on national and international evidence, as well as local experience to explain the factors that may impact on the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families. It identifies the groups at higher risk of poor outcomes and suggests effective responses and priority areas for action.

The framework has been developed to support the wide range of individuals and organisations who contribute to the mental health and wellbeing treatment of veterans and their families. This includes civilian organisations such as government departments, health service funders, workforce and research bodies, and health provider groups such as doctors, nurses and allied professions. It will also be useful for the New Zealand Defence Force, and service and veterans' organisations.

The overall aim is to ensure that existing services in New Zealand are alert to the needs of veterans; and that these are understood and taken into account when any new mental health and wellbeing policies, strategies, or plans are developed.

Upcoming commemorations

The Chief of Defence Force is responsible for organising all New Zealand overseas military commemorations, including Anzac Day commemorations at Gallipoli. The programme of overseas commemorations is planned and coordinated with the NZDF, MFAT, and MCH. You will need to discuss ministerial attendance at the various commemorations with your colleagues.

The Minister for Veterans is the Minister responsible for Anzac Day commemorations at Gallipoli. The Head of Heritage, Commemorations and Protocol from the New Zealand Defence Force will brief you on this.

Military commemorations are organised by the Visits and Ceremonial Office (VCO) within DIA, with involvement from NZDF and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. The NZDF Director of Heritage, Commemorations and Protocol will provide you with regular briefings on arrangements for commemorations. From time to time you will also receive invitations to local-level ceremonies and commemorations.

New declarations of operational service

From time to time we will bring you recommendations for declarations of operational service. The 2014 legislation changed the criteria for qualifying operational service. Those now in force cover a broad range of operational and environmental threats, including non-State actors and security forces. The previous Act had referred only to service in war or emergencies (which were not further defined).

Declarations of qualifying operational service can be made before, during, or after deployments. Those which are brought to you usually relate to new deployments of NZDF personnel.

We have recently completed a retrospective review of deployments between 1974 and 2014 which was done in consultation with the veteran community. This was done to ensure equity and consistency for all who have served. It involved reassessing a number of deployments that had originally been considered against criteria in the War Pensions Act, against the new criteria now in place. Following the review, some changes were made to deployments that are declared qualifying operational service under the VSA2014.

Our international relationships

VA's international liaison relationships are focused on sharing experiences, and developing an understanding of best practice in addressing the needs of veterans. There are no direct parallels between the operating environment in New Zealand (where ACC and a strong public health system are dominant features) and those in other countries, but there are enough similarities to make these liaison relationships valuable and productive.

Co-operation (known as "Five Eyes co-operation") is in place between four Commonwealth countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom), and the United States. There are regular meetings of Ministers and senior officials of these countries who have responsibility for veterans' affairs. The most recent such meeting attended by New Zealand was in Sydney in 2018. A meeting that had been scheduled for May 2020 had to be postponed because of COVID-19, and a further meeting, scheduled for London in May 2023, was also postponed. No future date for this meeting has yet been confirmed.

A formal Statement of Intent between Five Eyes Ministers was signed in Sydney in 2018.

Veterans' Affairs' closest international relationship is with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) in Australia. We have had a Memorandum of Understanding between Ministers since 1966, and this is currently being updated to reflect changes to agency names and relevant legislation. Several hundred New Zealand veterans reside in Australia. Their entitlements are paid directly from New Zealand, and DVA acts as our agent in ensuring that other services (such as medical services) are delivered to them. There are regular teleconferences between senior officials in the two countries.

VA also has a relationship with the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans' Affairs (MPVA) in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Officials participate in conferences hosted by the MPVA along with representatives of counterpart agencies from Canada, Australia, and the United States. In September 2019, VA signed a Statement of Intent with the MPVA, noting ongoing cooperation between the two countries on veteran matters. Korea also hosts ministerial level meetings from time to time, with the last one held in July 2023. VA will inform you of any meeting requests from ROK, however, these may also come directly to your office from time to time.

Part 2 – Your responsibilities

You have statutory responsibilities as Minister for Veterans under the VSA2014 and under section 15 of the Burial and Cremation Act 1964.

We have listed below some of the areas relating to these responsibilities that we will discuss with you regularly, or on which we will seek your decisions. We will provide briefings to you when decisions need to be made on any of these matters.

Financial responsibilities

As Minister you will seek appropriations relating to veterans within Vote Defence Force (in 2025/26 this totalled $29.614 million); and Vote Social Development (in the 2025/26 Estimates this totalled $132.278 million). Further information on financial matters is provided in Appendix 4 of this briefing.

You may be invited to appear before the Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee at the annual Estimates hearing when Vote Defence Force is considered. The Chief of Defence Force and the Head of VA will accompany you.

Declarations of qualifying operational service

Section 9 of the VSA2014 states the role of the Minister in making declarations that deployments are considered qualifying operational service for the purposes of the Act.

When the Chief of Defence Force considers that a deployment poses a significant risk of harm to those deployed, he will recommend to you that you declare that deployment to be qualifying operational service under the Act. That declaration will qualify those who took part in the deployment to support from Veterans' Affairs, should they have been injured or become ill as a result of their service.

There will be occasions when the responsible Minister needs to advise Cabinet of the intention to make a declaration of qualifying operational service before the declaration is made. This is because the extension of entitlements under the Act increases Crown liability, and the availability of these funds needs to be confirmed. Should you need to advise Cabinet before making a declaration of Qualifying Operational Service, we will prepare the necessary Cabinet documents for you.

Declarations relating to burial in Services Cemeteries

Section 15 of the Burial and Cremation Act 1964 deals with services cemeteries and who may be buried there. It specifies the Minister for Veterans may declare eligibility for burial in these cemeteries following consultation with the Minister of Defence and the RNZRSA.

When the Chief of Defence Force recommends that you declare a deployment to be qualifying operational service, he will also recommend that those covered by that declaration, and their spouses or partners, should be eligible for burial in a Services Cemetery. We will prepare letters for you to use in consulting with the Minister of Defence and the RNZRSA on these matters. Once their comment has been received, a notice in your name, declaring eligibility for services cemetery burial, will be published on the VA website.

Decisions relating to Statements of Principles

Statement of Principles (SOPs) provide definitions of a disease or injury and specify what factors must exist for the condition to be causally connected to a veteran's service. They are legal instruments, based on medical scientific evidence. They help to guide decision makers at Veterans Affairs on the relationships

between medical conditions and service. The SOP set out factors which may cause the condition, or aggravate or worsen it. They are developed in Australia by the Repatriation Medical Authority, and are regularly reviewed and updated as required.

Statements of Principles were introduced when the VSA2014 was passed. The aim was to enable decisions on claims to be made in a more consistent and less subjective way than under the previous legislation. Section 22 of the Act specifies how Statements of Principles should be used and the responsibilities of the Minister for Veterans relating to these.

Four or five times each year we will prepare a paper recommending changes to existing Statements of Principles that are already being used in New Zealand by VA, or the application of new ones. You will need to take some of these to the Cabinet for their agreement, but you are able to approve minor changes to Statements of Principles on your own authority. Statements of Principles are applied by regulation in New Zealand.

The next group of Statements of Principles will be brought to you, for consideration, later in 2026.

Approving ex gratia payments to qualifying Vietnam veterans

New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam conflict was controversial, and returning personnel faced a number of consequences for having fought in an unpopular war. To redress the resulting grievances, the Government and organisations representing Vietnam veterans signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2006, in which a number of undertakings were given and conditions outlined .

The following year an appropriation was established to fund support targeted specifically to the Vietnam cohort and their particular needs (which included dealing with the effects of Agent Orange). This enables ex-gratia payments to be made to Vietnam veterans and/or members of their family who have conditions known to be associated with service in Vietnam; and to provide annual comprehensive medical assessments for Vietnam veterans.

In 2021, two new conditions were added to Schedule 1 of the MoU, which lists those known conditions to be associated with potential exposure to herbicides and defoliants. As one of these conditions, hypertension, is prevalent in the aging population of which Vietnam veterans are part, this resulted in a significant increase to the number of those eligible to claim an ex gratia payment. Cabinet agreed to increase the appropriation in order to meet anticipated claims. The annual appropriation is currently $3.1 million.

Each ex gratia payment requires ministerial approval. There is an established process for managing approvals and payments. A list of recipients is sent to your office for review. Once you have given your approval to make ex gratia payments to those listed, VA sends a standard letter to the recipient in your name. For this, we will require your approval to use your electronic signature.

Appointments to independent boards and trusts

Three independent boards were established under the VSA2014. Part 8 of the Act specifies their roles, and the responsibilities of the Minister for Veterans in relation to them. VA provides administrative support to these three bodies.

The Minister appoints the Chair, Deputy Chair, and members of:

- the Veterans' Advisory Board;
- the Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board; and
- the Veterans' Health Advisory Panel.

In addition, the Minister, jointly with the Minister of Defence, appoints the chairperson of the Viet Nam Veterans and Their Families Trust (which was established in 2007). Internal Affairs administers the Trust.

See Appendix 3 for the membership of these boards and trusts.

A number of appointments are due to expire in 2027.

Decisions relating to presumed injuries, illnesses or conditions

Section 21 of the VSA2014 describes the responsibility of the Minister for Veterans to specify injuries, illnesses or conditions that must be treated as service-related, and under what circumstances.

These "presumptive lists" have been grandparented from the previous legislation, and are distinct from the Statements of Principles. There are presumptive conditions for a number of earlier cohorts (including Second World War prisoners of war, Vietnam veterans, and veterans who may have been exposed to nuclear radiation). In recent years, the Statements of Principles process has been the avenue for recognising any new research that associates illnesses or conditions with service.

How Veterans' Affairs supports you

VA works closely with a member of the NZDF who is appointed to your office as Military Private Secretary to advise you on matters relating to your Veterans portfolio.

We will provide you with:

- a weekly briefing note on recent and forthcoming events that relate to your portfolio;
- quarterly reports with information about how we are tracking against our objectives and performance indicators;
- advice and briefing papers about a range of matters that bear on your portfolio;
- draft responses to written and oral parliamentary questions directed to you in your capacity as Minister for Veterans; and to Official Information Act requests directed to you in your capacity as Minister for Veterans;
- support for your ministerial adviser, and press secretary when veteran-related matters arise; and
- support at international meetings that you attend as Minister for Veterans.

We will also prepare any Cabinet papers dealing with veteran matters that you require.

In the past, we have had a standing arrangement to meet with the Minister each fortnight. Our VA team is accompanied by others from the NZDF when matters which the NZDF is managing for you are to be discussed. The NZDF, for example, is responsible for briefing you about significant overseas commemorations.

Part 3 – Strategic issues

We would like to discuss three strategic issues with you at an early stage.

Our three strategic issues are:

- The impact of the 2025 High Court case on our applications and future liability.
- The need for sustainable funding to prepare for an increased number and an increased complexity of applications for support.
- The need for the health sector to have adequate services so we can serve veterans at the time when they most need assistance.

Impact of 2025 High Court case

In 2021, a veteran applied to VA for a disablement pension. The application was declined on the grounds that the condition (glioblastoma) was not related to his service. The veteran appealed this decision to the independent Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board (VEAB) and the Board upheld his appeal in a majority decision.

The basis of the Board's decision was that the condition should have been presumed to have been attributable to the veteran's service, as a previous appeal decision under the now-repealed War Pensions Act 1954 had accepted a probable association of that condition with service.

The Crown appealed the VEAB decision on a matter of law to the High Court. The Court's judgment allowed the appeal of the Crown and sent the case back to the VEAB to consider again in light of the Court's considerations and the legal guidance it provided. In 2024 the VEAB issued its final decision and confirmed that the condition must be treated as service-related. The Crown again appealed to the High Court to seek clarification on how the VSA2014 should be interpreted. In 2025, the High Court found against the Crown.

Implications for the Veterans' Support Act 2014

There are several implications to the High Court's judgment and, specifically, the associated guidance on questions of law that the VEAB was directed to consider. Most significantly, the guidance, in effect, downgrades the role of the Statements of Principles that the legislation requires VA to use. These were introduced to assure veterans that the most up-to-date scientific information would underpin VA decisions, and that these would be consistent across claims, but the judgment sees them rather as just one element of the decision-making process.

s. 9(2)(g)(i)

We continue to actively engage with veterans to ensure there is good information available to all on what is required for an application to be successful, and to provide them with clear and simple information on the relevant sections of the Act.

s. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Addressing delays in processing claims from eligible veterans

VA has legislative obligations to ensure that veterans who have been harmed or injured in their service to New Zealand receive the appropriate support and entitlements promptly to reduce the risk of further harm.

Both the volume and complexity of veterans' entitlement claims have been increasing for several years. s. 9(2)(g)(i)

During the past two years, VA has received additional funding and recruited frontline staff which has reduced the backlog of claims. However, this funding was time-limited.

At present, the scheme has a 13% uptake of qualifying veterans. We anticipate the number and complexity of claims will continue to increase. Uptake will also be impacted by the decision of the High Court. We are currently developing our resourcing and workforce plan for the coming years.

We will continue to work with you on our planning and establishing the sustainable foundations for us as an organisation, and to continue our support for the veterans of New Zealand.

Health sector pressures affecting levels of service

Veterans can experience physical and mental health conditions disproportionately compared to the general public. The physical demands of service are often extreme, all while working in dangerous, hostile and unforgiving environments. Psychologically, these demands and the exposure to the environments and threats inherent to military service, create unique psychological stressors.

These burdens are not only borne by service people but also by their whānau and loved ones. The challenges of forced separation, often with irregular or limited opportunities to connect with whānau, affect the health and wellbeing of the families and the relationships that sustain them.

VA provides health support services for eligible veterans. The provision of these services is reliant on the availability of the right specialist care at the right time. Our ageing population is putting pressures on our health sector, leading to delays in treatment and care or the unavailability of particular services. We are also reliant on specialist medical knowledge for guidance, as new health information comes to light.

We use the Statements of Principles from Australia as our guiding principles for establishing conditions related to service, however, these still need to be considered by medical professionals within the New Zealand context before they are adopted for use in New Zealand.

We will provide you with regular briefings on how we work with the health care sector.

Appendix 1

Our work at a glance

$240.18 million annual budget for Veterans' Affairs in Financial Year 2026/27



25,000+ registered with Veterans' Affairs

10,000+ clients receiving payments

6,500 case-managed



More than 7,000 clients receive Veterans' Independence Programme home services



$43.94 million paid out in ex-gratia payments since November 2021 to 1145 veterans/spouses



Our Veteran Support Centre team answers more than 38,000 phone calls and emails a year



We have more than 13,000 subscribers to our E-Newsletter



We help maintain 183 services cemeteries



We maintain a register of New Zealand Vietnam veterans



We hold case management clinics



We conduct forums and expos for serving and ex-serving veterans and their whānau



We have 129 FTE staff



Independent survey in 2025/26 showed 95 percent overall satisfaction with Veterans' Affairs services and support

Appendix 2

Organisational structure

Veterans' Affairs sits within the People Capability Portfolio of the NZDF.



Air Marshal Tony Davies
Chief of Defence Force



Jacinda Funnell
Chief People Officer

Veterans' Affairs leadership

We have a small senior management team. These are the people you will likely see most often, but we will also make available other subject matter experts to brief or support you whenever this might be helpful.



Alexander Brunt
Head of Veterans Affairs



Shakila Davies
Deputy Head of Veterans Affairs (Operations)



Shelley Des Forges
Deputy Head of Veterans Affairs (Policy, Data and Support Services)



Emily Taylor-Hall
Deputy Head of Veterans Affairs (Finance and Administration)



Elaine Myers-Davies
Chief of Staff

Appendix 3

Independent Boards and Trusts

Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board

The Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board (VEAB) determines appeals by veterans and other claimants against reviewed decisions by Veterans' Affairs relating to their claims for entitlements under the Act.

The VEAB has four members, one of whom must be a lawyer of at least seven years' standing who must be appointed as the Chairperson. Two of the members must be medical practitioners, one of whom must be nominated by the RNZRSA.

Once an appeal has been determined by the VEAB, the only possibility for further review is through the High Court – and cases can only be taken to the High Court on an issue of law.

The Chairperson of the Board is Vicki Campbell.

Other members of the Board are Professor Tristram Ingham, Dr Christopher Holdaway and Lucila van Dam.

The terms of appointment of the Chair and one other member is due to conclude 2028, the terms of the two medical practitioners is due to, and the term the two medical practitioners is due to conclude in 2027.

Veterans' Advisory Board

The Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) responds to requests from you for advice, and may initiate work on such things as policies relating to veterans' entitlements.

The VAB's work has included reports to the Minister on the Review of the Te Arataki Action Plan and a proposal for the way forward, advice on the definition of a veteran, and a national recognition day for veterans.

The Board has up to seven members and one serving veteran (ex-officio), nominated by the Chief of Defence Force.

The Chairperson of the Board is Karen Rolleston.

Other members are Rex Alexander, Mark Compain, Nick Olney, David Benfell, Kevin Allan, Melissa Ross, Warrant Officer Class 1 Wiremu Moffitt and Warrant Officer Class 1 Waiheke Cross (Deputy for Warrant Officer Class 1 Wiremu Moffitt).

The terms of appointment of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are due to conclude in 2028, with the terms of the remaining members concluding in 2027.

Veterans' Health Advisory Panel

The Veterans' Health Advisory Panel (VHAP) provides you with advice and guidance on matters such as the impacts of service on veterans' health; and the relationship between qualifying operational service and impairment for the purpose of assessing eligibility to entitlements.

In 2023, the VHAP concluded a report on the health impacts of exposure to ionising radiation, with particular reference to implications for New Zealand's nuclear veterans. This report was passed to the then Minister for Veterans in March 2023, and was publicly released in July 2023.

The VHAP has nine members, including three ex-officio members: a medical practitioner nominated by the Chief of Defence Force, a medical practitioner nominated by VA, and a representative of the VAB.

The Chair of the Panel is Cathy O'Malley.

Other Panel members are Dr Ian Civil (Deputy Chair), Dr Marie Bismark, Daniel Patrick, Rex Alexander (ex-officio Veterans' Advisory Board), Lieutenant Colonel Robert Duncan (ex-officio Chief of Defenc Force), and Dr Michael O'Reilly (ex-officio Veterans' Affairs).

The terms of appointment of five members are due to conclude in 2027, with the terms of the remaining two members concluding in 2028.

Veterans' Medical Research Trust Fund

The Veterans' Medical Research Trust grants and awards money for research into contemporary veterans' health. The Veterans' Health Advisory Panel calls for proposals for research that benefits the health and wellbeing of New Zealand Veterans.

The Head of Veterans' Affairs acts as the operational Chief Executive of the Trust Fund.

Viet Nam Veterans and their Families Trust

The Trust is a non-statutory organisation. It was established when the Crown signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2006 with representatives of Vietnam veterans.

The Government provided the Trust with capital of $7 million for an initial 30-year period. The interest on that sum is available for the Trust to distribute. The Trust Deed requires repayment of the capital at the end of the 30-year period.

The Trust has four trustees and a Chair. The Chair is jointly appointed by the Minister for Veterans and the Minister of Defence. The current Chair was appointed in July 2026. The trustees are appointed by the New Zealand Vietnam Veterans' Association and the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association. The Trust is administered by the Department of Internal Affairs.

The Chair of the Trust is Lieutenant General Sir Jeremiah (Jerry) Mateparae, GNZM, QSO, KStJ.

Other trustees are Patrick Duggan, Robert Hughes, Graham Gibson and Helen Pearse-Otene.

Appendix 4

Appropriations: Minister for Veterans

The appropriations in 2026/27 are $373.41 million.[1]

The Vote appropriation forecast spending for Financial Year 2026/27 consists of the following outputs.

Vote Defence Force – administered by Veterans' Affairs

Departmental Output Expenses	Administration Service	$9.704 million
	Policy Advice	$0.231 million
	Services and Payments to Veterans	$10.863 million
Non-Departmental Output Expenses	Development and Maintenance of Services Cemeteries	$0.746 million
Non-Departmental Other Expenses	Support for Vietnam Veterans (Ex-Gratia Payments and Comprehensive Medical Assessments for Vietnam Veterans)	$3.100 million
	Veteran Assistance to Attend Commemorations and Revisit Battlefields	$0.200 million
	Fair Value Write Down on Veteran Trust Loans and Thirty-years endowment	$0.203 million
	Impairment of Debt for Benefits or Related Expenses	$0.250 million
	Grant Payments to Non-Government Organisations	$0.275 million
	Service Cost-Veterans' Entitlements	$72.406 million
	Unwind of interest	$143 million
Total		**$240.978 million**

Vote Social Development – administered by Ministry of Social Development (as at Estimates)

Departmental Output Expenses	Processing and Payment of Veteran's Pension	$0.744 million
Non-Departmental Benefits or Related Expenses	Veteran's Pension	$131,683 million
Total		**$132.427 million**

[1] $240.978 million from Vote Defence Force 2026/27 budget and $132.427 million from Vote Social Development budget.