

How our military personnel are treated during and after their service speaks volumes about our values and who we are as New Zealanders. Those who have served our country shouldn't be left behind.

Your opinion matters

The Veterans' Advisory Board want to know how New Zealanders feel about service personnel and what our country does for them. We wish to gauge whether New Zealanders think we should have a binding agreement or 'Kawenata' between service personnel and their whānau, the Government, and the people of New Zealand.

The Veterans' Advisory Board want New Zealanders to have a say about a Kawenata. Your opinion matters, and it will shape what happens next for service personnel and their whānau.

Service personnel and their whānau can face challenges

Military service personnel help to protect our country, support recovery from natural disasters and emergencies both in New Zealand and the Pacific. Service personnel conduct search and rescue operations, conduct maritime surveillance, deploy overseas, and provide training.

They accept that they may be placed in harm's way, must follow order and may have little choice about where they are based and what they do. They may be injured, and possibly die as a result of their service. They must be ready to respond at short notice and in high-risk environments. Service personnel can spend long periods away from whānau and other support networks, and their service can affect the wellbeing of their whānau.

The transition to civilian life after leaving the Defence Force can also be difficult for some people.

Message from the Minister for Veterans

Transcript (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/about-veterans-affairs/our-partners-and-the-veteran-sector/boards-and-panels/veterans-advisory-board/mission-feedback/transcript/>)

More information on an agreement or Kawenata

What is a Kawenata?

A Kawenata is a written promise or agreement that binds the parties in a permanent relationship, like a pact.

The Kawenata could acknowledge the contribution service personnel give and the potential harm that they and their whānau may face. It could make a commitment to ensuring they are not disadvantaged by their service in comparison to other New Zealanders. It could also help to ensure service personnel and their whānau receive support if they need it.

What will the Kawenata say/do?

The Kawenata would essentially be a formal promise to better recognise the contributions of service personnel to our country and provide support and services as needed. It would set expectations and influence decisions about how we support and recognise current and former service personnel and their whānau.

Support and recognition provided under a Kawenata could be led by local groups, communities, organisations, charities, businesses, iwi, or the Government.

The Veterans' Advisory Board are interested in what you think could be offered. Examples might be help when leaving the forces and integrating into new communities or offering support for whānau health and wellbeing.

Who would the Kawenata be for?

The Kawenata would be for all people who are serving or have served with the New Zealand Defence Force including the Royal New Zealand Navy, the New Zealand Army, and the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This group are considered 'service personnel' and would be central to any Kawenata, along with their whānau. It would not include former and current civilian employees who have never served.

The Veterans' Advisory Board recognise that there are other groups of people who provide very important services in New Zealand, like emergency service personnel. However, at this stage they are seeking your views on a Kawenata for military service personnel.

Who is leading the discussion?

The Government has asked the Veterans' Advisory Board to discuss with New Zealanders the possibility of establishing a Kawenata. The Veterans' Advisory Board is an independent statutory body that provides advice to the Minister for Veterans.

The Veterans' Advisory Board is also leading discussions with iwi, business, community and representative organisations, and service providers.

Do other countries have anything similar?

The United Kingdom and Australia both have something like a Kawenata. Australia has a Defence Veterans' Covenant and the United Kingdom has an Armed Forces Covenant.

Australian Defence Force Veterans' Covenant

"We, the people of Australia, respect and give thanks to all who have served in our Defence Force and their families.

We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice demanded of all who commit to defend our nation.

We undertake to preserve the memory and deeds of all who have served and promise to welcome, embrace and support all military veterans as respected and valued members of our community.

For what they have done, this we will do."

The Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant encourages the Australian community to acknowledge the unique nature of military service, and support veterans and their families. It aims to recognise and acknowledge that the people of Australia value their Defence Force and those who have committed to defending their nation.

The Covenant is a new initiative that was enshrined in the Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Act 2019. An extensive system of specialised supports for Australian veterans already existed at the time the Covenant was developed. These supports and entitlements remain, and the Act provides general recognition that veterans may require support in areas such as health, employment, training, housing, access to justice, social wellbeing or community engagement.

The Covenant provides the framework that enables veterans and reservists to better connect with their community. The Covenant is supported by a recognition package including a veteran card, lapel pin and oath. Lapel pins and cards provide the opportunity for Australians to identify veterans when they are not in uniform or wearing their medals and show respect to them and their family. The Veteran Card enables access to health services.

Employers, businesses, local community groups and the broader Australian public can commit their support for the Covenant. The Covenant includes the Australian Partners of Defence membership programme which works with businesses and organisations to deliver offers to Veteran Card holders, in areas such as retail, accommodation and travel.

United Kingdom Armed Forces Covenant

"The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant."

The United Kingdom covenant was developed 20 years ago. The UK published the covenant in its current form in 2011.

It is intended to be an enduring covenant between the people of the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Government and all those who serve or have served in the armed forces of the Crown and their families. In essence, the UK Covenant is:

- A promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families are treated fairly.
 - That they suffer no disadvantage in communities, the economy and society in comparison to other citizens as a result of their service to the country.
 - That special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.
- An opportunity for the nation to say thank you to the armed forces and a reminder of what they do.

The rationale for the covenant is that the UK removes a degree of choice from its armed forces and their families and veterans and in return this provides ongoing recognition and gives something back. The covenant recognises the moral obligation to those who serve. The covenant focuses on helping members of the armed forces community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen. The covenant provides for support in many areas including education and family wellbeing, having a home, starting a new career, access to healthcare, financial assistance, and discounted services.

The parties involved include the armed forces, central and local government, businesses, charities, communities, and cadet forces and volunteers. The covenant is overseen by the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board.

There is a requirement to report on the success of the implementation of the covenant annually to Parliament.

For more information

Minister's media release—how New Zealand defines and recognises veterans

(<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/how-new-zealand-defines-and-recognises-veterans>) 

 Veterans' Advisory Board Terms of Reference [PDF, 689KB] (<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-12/TOR%20for%20VAB%20-%20December%202019.pdf>) 

Contact us

Email the Veterans' Advisory Board about the survey at survey@missionfeedback.nz (<mailto:survey@missionfeedback.nz>)

If you did not have an opportunity to complete the survey you can still email us. Although this may not be taken into account for the report, it will still be read.

In this section

[Reports and findings from Mission: Feedback](https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/about-veterans-affairs/our-partners-and-the-veteran-) (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/about-veterans-affairs/our-partners-and-the-veteran->)
