Veterans Support Amendment Bill No 2 passes third reading

The Veterans' Support Amendment Bill No 2 passed its third reading in the House on 30 July 2020. The Bill amends the Veterans' Support Act 2014 and addresses a number of recommendations included in the 2018 Paterson Report. The changes come into effect on 1 October.

Provisions in the Veterans’ Support Amendment Bill No 2

- Veterans' Affairs can now fund mental health services for veterans with urgent needs before a decision has been made about whether to accept the veteran's application for support.
- Veterans' Affairs may continue to fund treatment and rehabilitation services when a veteran receiving them is imprisoned.
- Counselling can be extended to whānau when it is necessary for a veteran's wellbeing.
- Definitions in the Act have been modernised, such as the term 'child', to better reflect the make-up of modern families.
- The Children's Bursary has been extended to cover situations where a veteran's child lives overseas. The definition of recognised tertiary institutions has also been extended.
- The five-year restriction on childcare assistance has been removed.
- Some Veterans' Independence Programme services can now continue for the spouse or partner of a veteran for 12 months after a veteran goes into long-term residential care.
- It will be easier for surviving spouses or partners to access pensions and be reimbursed for funeral costs when a veteran dies.
- There is now a standard grace period of 28 days following the death of a veteran who has been receiving weekly compensation to minimise the chances of their whānau going into debt.
- Veterans’ Affairs has more flexibility in individual cases to make decisions that take into account links between service related trauma and criminal or self-destructive behaviours.
- Veterans’ Affairs now has discretion to recognise injuries, illness, or death if they occurred when a veteran was briefly absent without leave or committing a minor offence.
- Entitlements of other claimants (such as a veteran's child, or spouse or partner) will not be affected when a veteran is imprisoned.
- Veterans Affairs is required to focus on ensuring veterans are informed and engaged in the course of an application, and the flexibility for decision-making timeframes has been increased.
- Declarations of Qualifying Operational Service will now be published on the Veterans' Affairs website rather than by a notice in the Gazette.
- Publication of a declaration of Qualifying Operational Service is not required if there are security or operational reasons not to publish the details.
The process for setting Veteran's Pension rates has been aligned with the process for setting entitlements under the Veterans' Support Act 2014.