



More entitlements and support for children of Jayforce and Mururoa veterans

Veterans' Affairs has moved to ensure children of veterans exposed to nuclear radiation on operations are treated equally with more entitlements and support.

Nuclear radiation is a risk that New Zealand service people have been exposed to on three occasions in the Defence Force's history; in Japan at the end of the Second World War, off Malden and Christmas Islands in the Pacific in the 1950s and at Mururoa in French Polynesia while observing French nuclear tests in the 1970s.

Veterans themselves all qualify for entitlements and support from Veterans' Affairs, but until this week their children weren't all treated equally.

"We know this has been a matter of real concern to the veterans themselves and their families," said Head of Veterans' Affairs, Bernadine Mackenzie.

Last year, the independent Veterans' Health Advisory Panel (VHAP) reviewed the most up-to-date information on the health impact of exposure to nuclear radiation on veterans and their descendants. All of the conditions known to be associated with exposure to nuclear radiation are already covered by Veterans' Affairs entitlements, but the panel noted there was an inequity in the treatment of veterans' children.

More information on the 2023 VHAP literature review on the health impacts of exposure to ionising radiation (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/news-events/articles/nuclear-review-2023/>)

"The children of Operation Grapple veterans — those who served in the Pacific in the 1950s — have entitlements that until now have not been available to the children of veterans who served in Japan or at Mururoa. These include genetic counselling and genetic testing," Ms Mackenzie said.

"The panel saw no good reason for the difference and recommended that consideration be given to extending the entitlements to cover the children of all nuclear veterans, a recommendation the Government has agreed to."

"Genetic counselling helps people make informed decisions about genetic testing, and how the results and their implications can be interpreted. This, followed by the testing itself, is a package that should address the concerns that veterans have raised," Ms Mackenzie said.

"The panel also recommended the situation should be reviewed every seven to ten years so that New Zealand is aware of the most up-to-date information on the impact of exposure to nuclear radiation, and this will be done."

"In the meantime, it's good to know that the children of nuclear veterans will all be treated equally from now on."

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