

Minister announces boost for services to veterans and their families

Minister for Veterans Ron Mark has today announced additional funding to support the wellbeing of New Zealand's veterans and their families.

The funding will go towards health and wellbeing assessments for veterans to ensure that when they leave the Defence Force they are linked to the right support services.

"The review of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 published by Professor Ron Paterson identified that we need to do more for our veterans and their families," says Ron Mark. This new funding package will address some of his key findings, and help meet increasing demands for services.

"We now have upwards of 31,000 contemporary veterans in New Zealand. These younger veterans need early interventions to prevent service related mental and physical health conditions from getting worse.

"The new funding will be used to better support these veterans by ensuring they are contacted soon after they leave the NZDF and provided with a health and wellbeing assessment.

"If needed, veterans can then be quickly connected to a health provider or support service, so they will get the help they need, as soon as possible.

"The health and wellbeing of our veterans and their families is paramount, and we are delivering significant improvements in that area. But veterans are proud people, and sometimes they don't turn to Veterans' Affairs until it's too late. This is why early interventions are vital.

"Also announced today is a much needed capital injection for an upgrade of Veterans' Affairs existing client management system. Younger veterans expect to be able to get assistance online. Better IT systems will ensure routine transactions can be carried out electronically, while freeing up staff to spend more time on complex cases.

"This extra funding demonstrates the ongoing commitment from the Coalition Government to our veterans.

"It is no longer good enough to stand by and let our veterans fall through the cracks. We have a responsibility to put their wellbeing at the forefront of our minds.

"Today's announcement represents significant progress towards meeting the recommendations of the Paterson review, and will ultimately help those who have mental or physical challenges as a result of their service.

"It also builds on the secure funding for grants to the RNZRSA and the No Duff Charitable Trust that the Coalition Government announced last year as part of Budget 2018," says Ron Mark.

The boost in operating funding represents a 5.4 per cent increase on current Veterans' Affairs operating funding over the next four years.

In total it represents an additional funding package of \$4.1 million over four years for Veterans' Affairs. The extra money comprises an extra \$2.1 million in operating funding, and a capital injection of \$2 million to upgrade the existing client management system.

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Media contact: Mark Sleeman 021 862 712

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Does this funding address underlying issues raised in the Paterson Report which was released in May 2018?

A. It is a step in that direction. The review carried out by Professor Ron Paterson found the Veterans' Support Act 2014 to be unnecessarily complex and very difficult to understand and interpret. The funding will help to ensure policy underpinning the Act is consistent and easy for veterans to understand. It will fund work to improve how we define and recognise veterans and acknowledge the families of veterans. The policy work will ultimately lead to a revised Act.

How will the funding be used?

The extra funding will be used to simplify the application process for veterans, free up staff to deal with more complex cases earlier, and carry out work to amend the legislation. Prof Paterson found there was a backlog in dealing with all but the most urgent applications for support and assistance, which was creating uncertainty for veterans, delays in treatment and was negatively affecting veterans who were already suffering physical and mental distress.

Date

24 April 2019

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