



RSL NATIONAL COMMENT ON THE 2016-17 BUDGET

The National President of the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL) Rear Admiral Ken Doolan said the League welcomed the reversal of the decision to remove backdating of veterans' disability pension claims. "We considered the original decision to be without merit and campaigned forcefully for this outcome. Similarly, we note with pleasure the initiative to provide interim incapacity payments to eligible members of the ADF on discharge, at a level that matches their regular weekly earnings immediately prior to injury."

"It is also pleasing that funding for the adoption of the Alternative Dispute Resolution and case management processes within the Veterans Review Board, and the funding to establish the Single Appeal path under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act, 2004* (MRCA) is included in the Budget," he said.

The 2016-17 Budget features initiatives relating to the mental health of veterans and the children of veterans. The RSL is pleased with the \$37.9 million allocated to extend Non Liability Health Care (NLHC) to all current and former members of the ADF for the treatment of PTSD, anxiety, depression and alcohol and substance abuse disorders. However, we note with disappointment that similar consideration has not been given to other major categories of conditions affecting veterans' wellbeing, particularly muscular-skeletal conditions arising from ADF service.

"Strong RSL advocacy for funding to improve information technology systems with the Department of Veterans' Affairs was reflected in the Budget," the National President continued. "This is a long overdue but important step towards improving the time taken to process claims."

That said, there were several important veterans issues for which the RSL has strongly campaigned which were not included in the Budget. These include the provision of appropriate residential care for eligible younger veterans; the provision of adequate financial and social support to the carers of younger veterans; and that the Legal Aid scale of payments be updated so as to not disadvantage eligible veterans appealing their military compensation decisions before the AAT or Federal Court.

End

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