



POLICY & ADVOCACY MAY 2024 UPDATE



What the Commonwealth Budget delivers for veterans:

The Commonwealth Budget for 2024/25 was handed down by Treasurer, the Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers on 14 May. RSL NSW thanks the Albanese Government for its 2024/25 Budget and considered approach to assisting veterans and their families. Highlights of the budget include:

1. Continuing veterans' access to health and support programs: \$59.6M over three years to deliver measures to continue access to health and support services, including:

- \$10.2M over three years from 2024/25 to extend access to Provisional Access to Medical Treatment, providing access to funded medical treatment for ill and injured veterans awaiting liability determination on their claims
- \$48.4M over two years from 2024/25 for payments to providers to maintain the short-term continuation of the Veterans' Home Care and Community Nursing Program
- \$1M to extend the Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program to allow additional evaluation of the program.

2. Reducing the DVA claims backlog permanently:

- \$186M over four years from 2024/25 to reduce the time taken to process claims and respond to increased demand, process accounts, improve information accessibility, mental health supports and provision of Veteran Support Officers
- \$8.4M allocated for two years beginning 2024/25 to pilot IT solutions to improve workflow capacity and case management
- Employment of an additional 141 staff to ensure that backlogs do not re-emerge and to increase efficiency of the claims process.

3. Cost-of-Living:

- Every household will receive an energy rebate of \$300
- Veterans who hold a pension or concession card will see a freeze on PBS medication with a maximum cap of \$7.70.

4. Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

- Additional \$1.2M over three years from 2024/25 to maintain Australia's membership of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

5. Supporting Veteran-Owned Business Grant Program:

- Self-employed veterans will receive \$400,000 over three years from 2024/25 through an extension of the Supporting Veteran Owned Business grant program.

In the lead-up to the budget, RSL NSW worked closely with peak health bodies, including the Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Psychology Society and the Australian Medical Association to call on the Government to significantly increase co-payments paid to doctors, warning that low levels of payment for treating veterans is preventing clinicians from offering health care.

Sustained advocacy is required across multiple policy areas, including DVA fee schedules, extension of the Non-Liability Health Care entitlement to include all reservists, investment in the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP), and enhanced training, education and support for volunteer and paid advocates. RSL NSW is committed to working with state and federal governments, partner-organisations, ESOs and peak health bodies to ensure that these matters are addressed as a priority.

RSL's response to the proposed Veterans' Entitlements legislation:

After consultation with members, RSL NSW has worked with RSL State Branches and RSL Australia to lodge a detailed submission in response to the Government's release of the draft Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024.

The Bill will implement the single model as proposed in the Veterans' Legislation Reform Consultation Pathway, aimed at simplifying the rehabilitation and compensation claims process.

The RSL has welcomed the Government's proposed legislation to simplify veteran entitlements and has consulted across the breadth of the League to ensure members' voices inform the development of fit-for-purpose legislation that best serves veterans and their families.

To read more about the draft Veterans' Entitlements legislation, or view the full submission, [click here](#).

"The RSL will continue to advocate strongly to ensure the legislation is fit-for-purpose and best meets the current and future needs of our veteran community and that no one is disadvantaged by the changes."
- RSL Australia President Greg Melick

Updates from the Veteran Services and Policy Committee:

The RSL NSW Veteran Services and Policy Committee (VSPC) met on 30 April 2024. The Committee's focus centred on the RSL's response to the proposed Veterans' Entitlements legislation, sustained efforts to raise the DVA fee schedule, improving provisions for trusteeships, and continued work on motions from Congress.

The committee noted that concessions across NSW are generous when compared to other states and territories. RSL NSW will continue to work with the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) to stay updated on new, existing and amended concessions to ensure all veterans can access the support and assistance they require.

RSL NSW will also be present at OVA's Nowra Defence & Veteran Community Forum on 23 May, to discuss advocacy, hospital identifiers and correction services.

The VSPC also heard from RSL LifeCare Veteran Services about the programs to support veterans and their families, which are supported by RSL NSW donations, and discussed the need to create awareness around veterans with service dogs to ensure they are adequately accommodated in public spaces.

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide:

As the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide concluded its public hearings in March and prepares to hand down its final report, the RSL has begun preparation of a consolidated submission to the Commonwealth Government.

RSL NSW covered the final Royal Commission hearing block in Sydney from 4-28 March 2024. Hearing Block 12 focused on identifying factors that could indicate risk of suicide, while also engaging with senior Ministers, ADF personnel and government departmental heads to determine the improvements required to better support veterans and their families.

In Commissioner Nick Kaldas' final address, he noted that a whole-of-government approach must be undertaken to reform and substantially improve policies around discharge, support, postings, and unacceptable behaviour.

The full summary of the final hearing block has been published on the [RSL NSW Royal Commission Office website page](#).

The final report is due in September. RSL NSW is committed to working with government at all levels to ensure that all recommendations of the Royal Commission are implemented.

“Our people deserve and should rightly expect the wellbeing support and care they need both during and after their service. I acknowledge that this has not always been the case and has tragically led to the deaths by suicide of some of our people.”

- Chief of the ADF,
General Angus Campbell

Updates from the Ex-Service Organisations Round Table:

RSL NSW joined the Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) on 14 May 2024 to discuss a range of issues, including DVA's response to the Royal Commission, the Medical Expenses Privately Incurred program and advocacy.

1. Claims processing: DVA noted at the ESORT forum that they are undertaking work to ensure they are well placed to rapidly enact the Government's response to the final report from the Royal Commission, and that they remain focused on clearing the claims backlog and improving the speed of claims processing.

2. Medical Expenses Privately Incurred (MEPI) program: ESORT was presented with three options on how DVA operational guidance could be amended to ensure more veterans are able to access financial assistance and the medical treatments they need. Members provided feedback on the options that will be taken to the Repatriation Commission for consideration.

3. Advocacy: ESORT discussed proposed governance arrangements for a professional organisation for claims and wellbeing advocates, outlining requirements for training and conduct.

Further information about ESORT, and the latest communique, can be found [here](#).

Updates from the National Veterans' Affairs Committee:

The RSL National Veterans' Affairs Committee (NVAC) is the forum where key policy issues in the veterans' affairs space are discussed by a council of delegates from each of the RSL State Branches. The top three items discussed at the meeting on 13th March were:

1. Legislative reform: How the League will seek member feedback and inform a robust response to the government's draft Veterans' Entitlements legislation.

2. Claims advocacy: Recognising the significant scarcity of qualified claims advocates, and how the RSL can collectively and proactively address this issue.

3. Aged care submissions: The RSL has contributed to two submissions to the government, an RSL veteran-focused submission and a joint submission in collaboration with 'National Organisations Working With Older People and Carers'.

Continued progress on the Register of Motions:

There has been considerable work undertaken to progress motions carried by delegates at the RSL NSW Congress. There are currently eight motions that are pending closure. An updated register of motions can be found [here](#). Some motions are pending approval to close, whilst others require ongoing negotiation and planning to work toward the outcome requested. RSL NSW has been advocating for veterans on a number of key issues, including:

Commonwealth Super Corporation: RSL NSW has been attempting to engage with Commonwealth Super Corporation (CSC) to organise a roundtable discussion. Members from NSW sub-Branched have shared their concerns and been actively involved in seeking clarity from CSC. Communications with the CSC will continue.

Homelessness: RSL NSW continues to work with RSL sub-Branched, the Department of Justice and Communities, and OVA on the issue of veteran homelessness. Research has highlighted successful strategies in allied countries such as Canada, and RSL NSW looks forward to presenting these pathways to OVA. RSL NSW continues to support RSL LifeCare in their provision of Homes for Heroes. Further information can be found [here](#).

To stay informed on the Royal Commission, policy updates, motion progress, and RSL submissions, visit the ['How We Support You' section of the RSL NSW Member Portal.](#)

Emergency assistance is available from:

Lifeline Australia	13 11 14
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467
Open Arms	1800 011 046
ADF Mental Health All-Hours Support Line	1800 628 036
Safe Zone Support	1800 142 072
Defence Member and Family Helpline	1800 624 608