



POLICY & ADVOCACY JULY 2024 UPDATE



Inaugural Middle East Area of Operations Commemoration:

In accordance with Motion 6.3, that was carried by delegates at the 2023 Annual General Meeting, RSL NSW hosted the inaugural Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) commemoration at 11am on Thursday 11 July 2024. An official service, honouring those ADF personnel who served in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan during 2001 – 2021, took place at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney. View photos on the [RSL NSW website](#). RSL NSW continues to lobby for a national commemorative day to acknowledge this generation of veterans and their families, and for increased investment of resources to support them.

Government announces MEAO memorial:

RSL NSW called on the NSW Government to establish a new memorial in Sydney that honours the service of MEAO veterans. On 10 July, it was announced that \$2 million has been allocated in the NSW Budget for the memorial. RSL NSW continues to be a powerful advocacy voice for veterans and their families, and the success of this campaigning is indicative of our strong relationship with all levels of government.

The Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) will undertake consultation with RSL NSW, Legacy, the Families of Veterans Guild, and the broader veteran community, to ensure all voices are heard and the memorial honours the sacrifices of contemporary veterans and their families.

RSL NSW remains committed to advocating for the wellbeing of veterans of all conflicts, and their families.

“Establishing a new memorial is not just about honouring the past, but also about acknowledging the ongoing contributions and sacrifices of our contemporary veterans.”

- The Hon. Chris Minns MP, Premier of NSW

‘Postcards of Honour’ school-based campaign:

‘Postcards of Honour’ is a school-based initiative by RSL NSW designed to connect primary and secondary school students with local veterans through the simple but powerful act of writing postcards.

Schools from 23 communities across NSW participated in the pilot ‘Postcards of Honour’ campaign, which invited students to learn about the importance of the Middle East Area of Operations commemoration, then write and decorate a postcard to show support for a veteran and thank them for their service.

Thanks to all the RSL sub-Branched, schools, and community groups for their involvement in this successful campaign. To read more about the ‘Postcards of Honour’ campaign, please visit the [RSL NSW website](#).

Ex-Service Organisation Peak Body:

The Returned and Services League has been working with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) to develop options for a new ex-service organisation (ESO) peak body that can unify and strengthen advocacy across the ESO sector to benefit veterans and their families.

ESOs have proposed multiple options for the new peak body that encompass work already underway in the sector. DVA has engaged Nous Group to conduct a new round of consultations and is seeking feedback from a range of stakeholders to understand how veterans and their families interact with organisations that provide advocacy support. RSL NSW looks forward to DVA’s findings and implementation of an ESO peak body.

Updates from the Veteran Services and Policy Committee:

The RSL NSW Veteran Services and Policy Committee (VSPC) met on 2 July 2024. The Committee's focus was centred on the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's lived experience book, healthcare and support for female veterans, DVA fee schedules, support for veterans living with blast-induced neurological trauma and the Veterans' Entitlements legislative reform.

The Committee appreciated the honest contributions featured in 'Shining a Light'. The lived experiences shared in the Royal Commission's book reinforced the need for RSL NSW to continue to evolve and advocate for the wellbeing of all veterans and their families. To read RSL Australia's reflection on 'Shining a Light', [click here](#).

RSL NSW continues to lobby for improved healthcare and changes to DVA fee schedules, seeking the support of peak health bodies to share their experiences.

RSL NSW has also been approached by a former ADF member and an RSL sub-Branch to advocate for greater understanding about the effects of blast-induced neurological trauma, and support for veterans living with the condition.

Veterans' Entitlements legislation referred to Senate Committee:

On 4 July 2024, the Senate referred the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry.

The Bill was presented in response to the first recommendation of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide to simplify existing entitlements legislation. The Government seeks to ensure that any claims made after 1 July 2026 are managed in accordance with this new legislation.

The Senate Committee is seeking submissions on the Bill via the [Parliament of Australia website](#) by 31 July 2024 and is due to finalise its report on 3 October 2024.

Progress timeline:

31 Jul 2024: Consultation closes on draft Bill.

3 Jul 2024: Draft Bill was tabled in Parliament.

Jun 2024: DVA thanked the RSL for its submission and responded to issues raised.

Apr 2024: The RSL consulted members to lodge a submission on the proposed legislation.

Feb 2024: The draft Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 was released.

Feb 2023: Government announced its intention to simplify veterans' entitlements legislation.

Aug 2022: The Royal Commission recommended legislative reforms to simplify and harmonise the veteran entitlement system.

Nov 2021: The RSL highlighted the need to consolidate the legislation governing veterans' entitlements in its submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Royal Commission's 'Shining a Light' lived-experience book:

On 20 June 2024, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's 'Shining a Light: Stories of Trauma & Tragedy, Hope & Healing' lived-experience book was presented to the Governor-General and tabled in Parliament.

The trauma-informed book, authored by journalist Patrick Lindsay AM, shares the lived experience of suicide and suicidal behaviour, with submissions bravely and generously shared by current and former-serving Australian Defence Force members, and their families.

The book includes chapters that focus on recruitment and early training, life in uniform, the impact of leadership, mental health battles, suicide and suicidality, families and loved ones, transitioning to civilian life, ESOs, dealing with DVA and growth from trauma.

Read more on the [RSL NSW website](#), or to download the book, go to the [Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide](#). Hard copies will be available soon.

"Together with our final report, we hope the book will lead to greater understanding of the sacrifices made by those who defend our country - and their loved ones - and help to drive real and lasting change."

- Royal Commissioners, Nick Kaldas APM (Chair), The Hon James Douglas KC and Dr Peggy Brown AO

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide:

Throughout the course of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, more than 5,000 written submissions, and 900 private sessions have allowed the Commissioners to read and listen to powerful and personal stories. The Royal Commission will host its Ceremonial Closing in Sydney on Wednesday 28 August 2024. More information, including the schedule, will be released closer to the event date.

The Final Report is due to be handed to Her Excellency, the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Samantha Mostyn AC, on 9 September 2024. The Report is expected to comprise of robust findings and practical recommendations designed to address the complex issues outlined in the terms of reference.

RSL NSW remains ready to implement recommendations handed down by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

To receive updates on the Commission's work, subscribe to the mailing list [here](#).

Digital Veteran Cards now in the myGov app:

Veteran Card holders can now add their Veteran Gold or White Card to the wallet in the myGov app. The digital wallet in the myGov app is a secure way to store government-issued cards and documents, including Medicare cards, Centrelink concession and healthcare cards, and COVID-19 Vaccination Certificates.

Veterans with a MyService account can add their digital Veteran Card to the wallet if they've linked their account to myGov. In addition to enabling storage of Veteran Cards, MyService can be accessed using the myGov app to submit claims, view the progress of claims, review accepted conditions, apply for treatment, book transport and more. For information, please visit the [Department of Veterans' Affairs website](#).

Progress on the Register of Motions:

There has been considerable work undertaken to progress motions carried by delegates at the RSL NSW Congress. Nine motions have been closed by way of letter issued to the respective sub-Branch. An updated Register of Motions can be found [here](#).

RSL NSW met with OVA to progress two motions, and the remaining motions require ongoing work with the Commonwealth Government. RSL NSW continues its advocacy on key issues, including:

Veteran Identifiers: RSL NSW has been working with likeminded ESOs to introduce a universal veteran identifier that would improve access to concessions, healthcare services and government support to improve veteran wellbeing.

Homelessness: The Federal Government has launched the Veterans' Acute Housing Program, committing \$24 million to make more crisis and transitional housing available for veterans and their families, as well as \$6 million to fund organisations to deliver access to specialist support services that address risk factors for homelessness. RSL NSW welcomes the \$30 million investment, which will help ex-service organisations to ensure that they are able to provide wraparound support for veterans.

RSL NSW continues to lobby the NSW Government to pursue pathways in NSW to minimise veteran homelessness, and supports the provision of homelessness services through RSL LifeCare Veteran Services' ['Homes for Heroes' program](#).

To stay informed on policy updates, visit the ['How We Support You' section of the 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