



POLICY & ADVOCACY NOVEMBER 2024 UPDATE



Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Final Report:

On 9 September, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide delivered its [Final Report](#). Contained within seven volumes, 122 recommendations were provided to guide how ex-service organisations (ESOs), community groups and State and Federal Governments can better support current and former serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their families. The League will work on an ongoing basis to see these implemented.

Several of the Royal Commission's key recommendations align with RSL NSW's current policy objectives, including:

- The establishment of a new Government agency focused on veteran wellbeing;
- The development of a national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing; and
- The creation of a national peak body for ESOs.

RSL NSW welcomes the progress already made by the Australian Government to simplify the complex legislation governing veterans' entitlements and clearing the backlog of unprocessed claims.

It is imperative that all governments, ESOs and community groups work together to improve outcomes for veterans and their families.

To read a full analysis of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's final recommendations, [visit the RSL NSW website](#).

"The leadership of the ADF and DVA should see this Royal Commission as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to drive meaningful and long-lasting change so serving and ex-serving ADF members, and their families, have the support they need and deserve."

- Commissioner, Nick Kaldas APM

Update from the RSL 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 10 September were:

1. The Royal Commission's Final Report's recommendations and next steps.
2. The Advocacy Governance Working Group's efforts, progress and providing feedback on the consultation paper.
3. Feedback on the National Consultation Framework Review.

Recommendations endorsed by the National Board inform the policy priorities the RSL pursues in its representation and lobbying of the Federal Government and other key stakeholders.

Parliamentary Submissions made by RSL NSW:

RSL NSW monitors State and Commonwealth legislative committees and makes submissions where additional government support may be needed to assist veterans and their families.

Inquiry into the Prevalence, Causes and Impacts of Loneliness:

RSL NSW made a submission to the NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues' inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in NSW. Testimony from veterans and their families during the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, along with research data, have highlighted that veterans and families may experience social isolation and loneliness as a result of their service.

The submission made by RSL NSW focused on the need for improved data collection and ways to identify at-risk populations, the benefits of existing wellbeing initiatives such as the RSL NSW Sport & Recreation Program, and steps the NSW Government can take to reduce the prevalence and impacts of loneliness in the veteran community.

To view the submission, [click here](#).

Inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards System:

In July, the Senate referred an inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards system to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Committee. RSL NSW made a submission that focused on the integrity and efficacy of the Defence Honours and Awards system, the effect of changes in criteria, and potential improvements to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

RSL NSW will continue to monitor the outcome of this inquiry, with the final report due to be handed down on 28 February 2025.

To view the submission, [click here](#) and view submission 6.

Advocating for veteran access to health services:

RSL NSW is aware that some Gold, White or Orange DVA card holders are experiencing difficulties accessing GPs and other medical service providers that provide bulk-billing support to veterans. Feedback from our veteran community is crucial to better understand how prevalent this issue is.

You are invited to share your insights and experiences by completing this [short five-minute survey](#), on or before 31 December 2024. You will not be required to divulge any personal medical details, and anonymous responses will be used to help the League advocate for better healthcare access for veterans.

RSL NSW recently advocated for veterans during consultation on the \$189 million Bulk-Billing Support Initiative, which saw the [NSW Government pass legislation](#) to extend the payroll tax rebate for GPs to include services billed to veterans with a Gold, White or Orange DVA card. The change is intended to help clinics keep costs down and continue to offer important primary care services to veterans.

Opening the Central Coast Veteran and Family Hub:

The new [Central Coast Veteran and Family Hub](#) has opened its doors at 31 Hely St, Wyong, giving veterans and their families on the Central Coast greater access to essential advocacy, health, and wellbeing services.

Operated by our partner charity, RSL LifeCare, and supported by RSL NSW sub-Branches, the Hub can connect veterans and their families to critical services including DVA claims and advocacy assistance, education and employment assistance, housing and homelessness support, social support and connection, and financial assistance.

At the launch, RSL NSW President Mick Bainbridge highlighted the success of the local Hubs. "RSL NSW is committed to supporting the operation and network of Veteran and Family Hubs across NSW because we know they work. RSL NSW has donated more than \$9.1 million to RSL LifeCare to ensure that veterans and their families are able to access the free, vital support they need."

Funding has been secured for the [North Coast Veteran and Family Hub](#), which will be coming to Tweed Heads. A temporary location will be available first, to provide service coverage for the local veteran community on the Far North Coast, while permanent premises are developed.

Anyone who cannot attend a Hub in person can still access free services and support at any time by contacting RSL LifeCare Veteran Services via hello@rsllifecare.org.au or (02) 8088 0388.

"7,600 veterans, and their families on the Central Coast, will benefit from the wide range of support services now available at their local Hub."

- The Honourable David Harris MP, Minister for Veterans

RSL NSW Policy Priorities for 2025:

The Veteran Services and Policy Committee has agreed on RSL NSW's policy priorities for 2025, which continue to build on the efforts made in 2024.

- Implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
- Establishing a permanent, independent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Wellbeing
- Developing pathways to support incarcerated veterans
- Supporting female veterans by advocating for improved health and wellbeing outcomes
- Improving claims and wellbeing advocacy for veterans
- Increasing processing capacity for DVA entitlements claims
- Improving access to healthcare for veterans and their families
- Funding research to address the cause of veteran homelessness
- Establishing a peak body for ESOs to improve service delivery, quality and improve support for veterans and their families.

To view the Policy Advocacy Strategy 2025, [click here](#).

Ex-Service Organisation Round Table Meeting:

The Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) met on 27 August 2024. ESORT received an update from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) on their readiness to respond to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide recommendations, and ways that they are improving invoice payments for veterans and service providers.

ESORT also discussed the proposed increase to the Grants in Aid funding, the adequacy of current legislative frameworks to support veterans in the event of future escalation of military activity, the need for a Defence and veteran student identifier on school enrolment forms, and concerns that onset considerations are not being correctly applied to claims for cervical and thoracolumbar spondylosis.

ESORT also noted the development of a Joint Defence and Veteran Family Strategy to guide how the Department of Defence and DVA will work to provide families with support.

The sustainable operation of Veteran and Family Hubs across Australia was raised, with an update from the DVA requested at the next meeting. RSL NSW will continue to advocate for ongoing and long-term funding of Hubs to ensure the needs of veterans and their families are met during and after service with the ADF.

To read the communiqué from the last ESORT meeting, [click here](#).

Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) Scoping Study:

RSL Australia has launched a major two-stage research initiative to better understand the needs and concerns of contemporary veterans and their families, and ensure that they are provided with the support and services they require.

The first phase of the project is the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) Scoping Study, which will run over the first half of 2025. A broader study will follow over two to three years and examine and assess the issues and concerns identified in much greater detail. This broader study will recommend enhancements and national strategies to improve the range and level of services and support provided to today's veterans and their families.

There have been several studies undertaken but no follow up of these veterans for more than a decade. It is clear that a significant piece of research is needed.

This study is funded and led by the RSL. It is independent of government, but is supported by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Department of Defence and the Repatriation Commission. It will engage RSL State Branches, sub-Branched and veterans Australia-wide.

A multidisciplinary consortium led by Gallipoli Medical Research, with Griffith University and the Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research, will conduct the research.

This project will undoubtedly be the most significant research initiative undertaken by the League for decades, and the RSL Australia Board sees it as a vital first step in enhancing the wellbeing of today's veteran community.

To learn more about the MEAO Scoping Study, visit the [RSL Australia website](#).

Update from the Veterans' Ministerial Council:

The Veterans' Ministerial Council provides ministers from across the States and Territories with a formal channel to resolve key priorities relating to veteran affairs. In recent months, the Veterans' Ministerial Council met to discuss the need to work collaboratively in light of the Final Report from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, the progress of veterans' legislation reform and the harmonisation of veteran concessions, the need to improve public access for veterans with psychiatric assistance dogs, the work of the DVA Aged and Community Care Taskforce, and their joint commitment to improving mental health outcomes for Australian veterans and families.

Read the communiqué from the [20 September](#) and [6 October](#) meeting.

Progress on the Register of Motions:

Thirteen new motions were approved at the 2024 AGM and have been added to the Register of Motions.

RSL NSW has continued to strengthen its relationship with the NSW Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA), working together to progress motions and ensure positive outcomes are achieved. From 2025, RSL NSW will meet with OVA on a quarterly basis to discuss the NSW Government's response to the Royal Commission, and the progress of motions.

Commonwealth Super Corporation: RSL NSW continues to work with Government agencies to seek responses to the questions raised by RSL NSW sub-Branches regarding the use of superannuation and its operation with Commonwealth pensions.

Homelessness: The State Government is working on the issue of veteran homelessness and attempting to improve the collation and collection of data, as well as working with Homes NSW to capture veterans in street counts. Homelessness will be addressed in future Veteran Strategy and Action Plans.

Museum of Contemporary Arts-Maritime Services Board War Memorial: RSL NSW met with OVA to determine a way forward with the Museum of Contemporary Arts to restore the former War Memorial and is drafting correspondence to Ministers to seek an update regarding this motion.

Veteran Identifiers: Advice is being sought to determine how veteran identifiers can be introduced to triage processes across Local Health Districts.

War Memorial Protections: RSL NSW is making progress on Motion 5.8 from the 2024 Congress and will seek to work with the Department of Communities and Justice, OVA and the broader State Government to enhance protections to our War Memorials.

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