ACT Party Responses

1. Veterans' Support Act 2014

Does your party support changes to the Veterans' Support Act 2014? If so, what would you like to see changed, particularly when it comes to fair access to support for different generations of veterans?

ACT supports practical changes that ensure veterans' legislation recognises service fairly and delivers effective support across different generations.

In Government, we have backed changes to recognise service in conflicts after 1966, alongside other wartime contributions previously omitted from the Act. We also support the Veterans' Recognition Bill and the Military Decorations and Distinctive Badges (Modernisation) Amendment Bill.

Further changes should address demonstrated gaps, make entitlements easier to understand and ensure veterans receive fair consideration of service-related conditions, including those that emerge years later. Veterans and organisations such as the RSA have an important role in identifying where existing rules fall short.

2. Eligibility for support

What is your party's position on who should be eligible for government-funded veteran support, and on the difference between being recognised as a veteran and qualifying for support under the Veterans' Support Act?

ACT supports recognising the contribution of those who served New Zealand, including personnel whose service has previously gone unrecognised.

We have backed extending eligibility for health, rehabilitation and financial support for deployment-related conditions to personnel who served on specified maritime operations around the Middle East and East Africa.

Recognition of service and eligibility for particular forms of support serve different purposes. All service deserves respect, while assistance should reflect individual circumstances, service-related harm and need.

Eligibility rules should be clear, evidence-based and straightforward to navigate. Veterans should understand the reasons for decisions and have accessible avenues to challenge them. Where someone falls outside specialist veterans' entitlements, they should still be able to access effective mainstream health and support services.

3. Veterans' Affairs

What would your party do to make sure Veterans' Affairs has the people, funding and resources it needs to provide veterans and their whānau with timely and effective support?

ACT has backed increased funding to reduce the waiting list of veterans seeking medical and rehabilitation support. We want that investment to translate into faster decisions and effective help.

Our wider approach to public services is to direct resources towards frontline delivery, reduce unnecessary administration and hold agencies accountable for results. Veterans' Affairs should be judged by the timeliness and quality of its support, rather than simply how much it spends or how many people it employs.

Future resourcing decisions should reflect demand, the complexity of veterans' needs and evidence of gaps in delivery.

Responsible management of the Government's finances is essential to sustaining these services. Reducing waste and debt-servicing costs creates more room to meet core responsibilities, including supporting those who have served.

4. Health and mental health

What would your party do to improve access to physical and mental-health support for veterans, particularly where an illness or injury is linked to military service?

ACT has supported increased funding to reduce veterans' waits for medical and rehabilitation support, alongside broader eligibility for personnel with deployment-related conditions.

Veterans would also benefit from ACT's additional $400 million investment in general practice over four years to retain experienced doctors, attract qualified overseas doctors and deliver more appointments.

Our Pharmacy First policy would allow pharmacies to treat more minor illnesses and help manage stable long-term conditions. We also propose closing the medicines funding gap with Australia.

For mental health, ACT's approach emphasises individual need, effective treatment and access to suitable providers, including providers who understand service-related trauma.

We favour using public, private and community expertise to get people appropriate care sooner. Success means veterans receiving treatment that improves their health, independence and relationships.

5. Transition from service

How would your party support NZDF personnel as they move from military service into civilian life, including with employment, health, housing, financial wellbeing and access to support?

Leaving military service can mean changing employment, housing, healthcare and support networks at the same time. ACT's approach is to remove barriers to building an independent civilian life while ensuring help is available where it is needed.

Our employment and small-business policies would make it easier for businesses to grow and hire, creating opportunities for veterans seeking work or starting their own business. Our housing policies tackle the planning, consenting and infrastructure barriers that make homes more expensive.

Better access to general practice, medicines and mental health treatment would also support the transition.

Applying these principles means clear information about assistance, coordination between the organisations involved and recognition of skills gained through military service. Support should build on veterans' capabilities while responding appropriately where injury or illness affects their ability to work.

6. Older veterans and independence

What is your party's position on helping older veterans, and veterans living with impairment, to stay independent and connected with their communities?

ACT values independence and people's ability to make decisions about their own lives. Support for older veterans and veterans living with impairment should help them remain safe, independent and connected to their communities.

We have backed increasing mileage reimbursement rates for eligible treatment-related travel by approximately 50%, helping veterans meet higher travel costs.

Our plans for more GP appointments and greater access to treatment through pharmacies would also help veterans manage health conditions closer to home.

Veterans' preferences should carry weight in decisions about their care, alongside recognition of the contribution made by family carers, volunteers and community organisations.

7. Families and whānau

How would your party recognise and support families and whānau where military service has had an ongoing impact on them?

Military service involves sacrifices by families as well as those in uniform. Partners, children and other family members can experience lasting effects, particularly where a veteran returns with an injury or ongoing mental distress.

ACT has backed extending access to health, rehabilitation and financial support for deployment-related conditions. Effective support for veterans can also reduce the pressure carried by their families.

Our wider health policies would improve access to general practice, medicines and community treatment for veterans and their families.

When evaluating veterans' services, the effects on family carers should be considered alongside outcomes for the veteran. Assistance should reflect actual

circumstances and needs, with clear information and straightforward processes for families already carrying substantial responsibilities.

8. Recognition of service

Beyond commemorations and medals, what practical steps would your party support to recognise the particular obligations, risks and consequences that come with military service?

ACT has long supported increasing defence spending to 2% of GDP to back the men and women who serve New Zealand. Practical recognition means properly supporting personnel during service and meeting our obligations when that service causes lasting harm.

We also have a specific commitment to restore neglected service graves by supporting the New Zealand Remembrance Army. Over eight years, its volunteers have restored more than 300,000 service graves and told over 15,000 individual service stories.

ACT will require councils to accept restoration work under a national standard developed by Veterans' Affairs in consultation with the Remembrance Army, recognise suitable organisations as national heritage restoration partners, and remove additional red tape.

We are prepared to set aside up to $1 million for the framework and a direct Crown grant to help clear the backlog. This backs volunteers already delivering results and gives practical expression to our respect for those who served.

9. Listening to veterans

How would your party make sure veterans and organisations supporting the veteran community have a genuine voice when government policy affecting veterans is developed?

Veterans and the organisations supporting them should help shape decisions about their services. That includes hearing from different generations, families and people whose experiences fall outside established support pathways.

ACT's service-graves policy demonstrates this approach. The Remembrance Army identified the obstacles created by dealing with dozens of councils and inconsistent rules. We listened and developed a practical policy to remove those barriers and support its work.

We would bring the same approach to other veterans' issues by listening to those affected, identify the specific problem and assess practical solutions.

Engagement should lead to clear explanations of what government has heard, what it intends to change and why. Its value should be measured by whether veterans' experiences improve the resulting policy and services.

10. Your top priority

If your party forms, or is part of, the next Government, what is the single most important change you would like to make for New Zealand veterans during the next Parliamentary term?

ACT's priority would be improving veterans' access to timely, effective health and rehabilitation support.

We have already backed increased funding to reduce waiting lists, wider eligibility for specified deployments and higher reimbursement for treatment-related travel. We want to build on that progress.

Our additional $400 million investment in general practice would improve access to appointments, while our wider approach would focus veterans' services on frontline delivery, clear processes and accountability for results.

For veterans, the practical test is whether they can understand what assistance is available, receive a timely decision and get support that improves their lives.

ACT will continue to back the Defence Force and veterans, ensuring those who serve New Zealand receive respect and support that continues to improve.