

National Party response to the Royal New Zealand RSA

Our soldiers, sailors, and aviators join the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) to serve the people of New Zealand, however that is needed, and we feel immense pride and gratitude when we see them stepping up and into situations that the rest of us are running from.

In an increasingly volatile world, our personnel are expected to be called upon more often, in more places, and for longer. For this, they must have the right training and equipment to respond in these challenging circumstances.

Funding of the New Zealand Defence Force has previously been constrained. Through the Defence Capability Plan 2025 we have laid out \$12 billion of planned commitments over 4 years, including \$9 billion of new spending. This will raise New Zealand's defence spending to two per cent of GDP, charting a path to double our defence spending over eight years.

Kiwis who have served our nation, our interests, and our way of life bravely, often at great personal sacrifice, deserve recognition for their service and contribution to New Zealand. National is committed to ensuring they are well supported both now and into the future.

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?

National is open to a review of the Veterans' Support Act 2014. National is also committed to better addressing the needs of veterans covered by the Veterans' Support Act, including by reducing waiting lists for medical and rehabilitative care, and ensuring both contemporary and historical veterans and their families are aware of and engage with the support services that they are entitled to.

National will also increase support for community organisations who provide services to veterans to extend the reach and range of support available to former service personnel, including those who don't qualify for support under the Veterans' Support Act.

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?

National has heard the voices of the military community who feel that the current legal definition of a veteran creates an unnecessary divide among those who have served. While the current definition of a veteran remains appropriate for determining eligibility for support entitlement, we have recognised and honoured more past and present soldiers, sailors, and aviators by updating the Anzac Day Act, and by introducing the Veterans Recognition Bill. We will commit to passing the Veterans Recognition Bill in our next term so more former personnel are recognised as veterans.

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 whanau with timely and effective support?

National has provided additional Budget funding for Veterans Affairs every year to speed up the processing of veterans claims and to ensure they are meeting their legal obligations, and we will continue to do so. It is a priority for National that veterans are receiving timely and appropriate care.

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?

National will increase support for community organisations who provide important services to both contemporary and historical veterans, including support accessing physical and mental health care, including those who don't qualify for support under the Veterans' Support Act.

We will also continue to support Veterans Affairs and other government agencies to better provide for the health and wellbeing of veterans, including by speeding up application processing times and continuing to improve data sharing across the public service so veteran status is considered as part of the provision of health and mental health care.

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?

Increasing the quality of transition support has been an area of focus for us over the last term. It's important we encourage NZDF and Veterans Affairs to engage with personnel early on in their service, so they know what support they are entitled to when they leave. We will also support efforts to work with community organisations and local businesses to provide connections, pathways, and support for personnel as they adjust to civilian life. For example, we'd like to see more initiatives like the NZDF partnership with Business NZ to encourage businesses to employ Veterans.

This is another area where increasing data sharing across government can also improve the transition experience for personnel engaging with public services like our healthcare system.

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?

It is incredibly important for veterans' health and wellbeing to stay independent and connected with their communities. We want all veterans to be aware of the support available to them and be able to access it in an easy and timely manner. That's why we'll continue to support Veterans Affairs with the resources to speed up the processing of veterans cases and support the incredible community organisations that work with a wide range veterans. Veterans Affairs has also done some great work travelling around the country to engage veterans communities face to face that have lower rates of accessing support, including rural and contemporary veterans.

7. Families and whanau

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

Decades of underinvestment have meant many military families have lived in homes that were no longer fit for modern family life, and were run-down, poorly laid-out, and insufficiently insulated. The Homes for Families programme recognises that providing personnel and their whānau with a warm, safe, dry home is central to their wellbeing. We were proud to open the first homes built through the Homes for Families programme

and will continue to deliver the modern, high-quality homes our personnel and their families deserve.

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?

Recognising and honouring veterans has been a big focus for National this term with the introduction of the Veterans Recognition Bill and updating of the Anzac Day Act. The Veterans Recognition Bill includes a covenant, or kawenata, which will formalise the relationship between the Government and veterans and act as a national promise to treat veterans with respect and dignity. Every veteran has a different view on what is important to them. We are open to looking at further changes that better recognise military service, but this needs to involve the voices of our veteran community.

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?

National will support Veterans Affairs to continue outreach work with veteran communities who have historically had less engagement with the veterans support system, including contemporary, rural and overseas veterans populations. National is proud to have the majority of veteran MPs, and they have worked hard to engage with veteran organisations and individuals. We are also keen to support and engage more with community organisations who are doing great work supporting veterans, to ensure we hear the voices of a wider range of the veteran community.

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?

National's priority for veterans is ensuring they receive timely and appropriate support that recognises their contribution to New Zealand and the continuous improvement of veteran wellbeing through the Te Arataki work programme.