

ATTACHMENT: QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE AND FURTHER INFORMATION AGREED TO BE SUPPLIED AT THE HEARINGS

Hon John Eren MP

VETERANS PORTFOLIO

17. Can you please provide examples of outreach to veterans?

In 2017-18 the Government provided \$360,446 in grants through the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund to ex-service organisations such as the RSL, Legacy and Carry On (Victoria) to assist in the provision of welfare services to veterans and their families. Some of these projects include:

- Over \$72,000 to the RSL for welfare support including in regional Victoria
- \$50,000 to Carry On Victoria for veterans welfare support
- Over \$98,000 to Legacy Clubs across the state, including for transport and heating support (purchase of firewood and contribution toward heating bills)
- Over \$26,000 for the Vietnam Veterans Association to support welfare services; and
- \$70,000 to Solider On, to assist veterans with employment initiatives.

There are many forms of outreach services provided to veterans in Victoria. The most tangible form of outreach to veterans is the hospital and nursing home visitation services provided by many Unit Associations and Ex Service Organisations (ESOs). Designated welfare officers will often undertake visits to hospitals and nursing homes to check on the welfare of the veteran and their family and provide support and assistance as required.

Most of the larger ESOs also provide pension advice and advocacy to veterans who wish to access DVA pensions and benefits. While these services are centre based and provided through veteran resource centres in country areas the services are also provided on an outreach basis to veterans who live in small towns, remote communities or have been hospitalised due to illness.

Another example of outreach is the RSL Active Program. The program provides support to younger veterans experiencing social isolation and while based in Melbourne it works in partnership with RSL Sub Branches across the State to deliver programs based on the local needs of veterans. The RSL Active program is funded by a \$400,000 commitment by the Victorian Government.

A wide range of Victorian concessions are available for eligible veterans, war widows and their dependents for costs including local council rates, water and gas bills, public transport and vehicle registration. In addition, the Victorian Government provides 17.5% annual electricity bill concessions to holders of DVA pensioner concession cards and DVA gold cards, as well as exemptions from other fees associated with electricity accounts including transfer fee waivers.

18. What areas of the public service have the 108 veterans gone into?

Response: Between 1 June 2017 – 28 February 2018 data shows that 108 veterans were employed across the Victorian public sector. Of the 108 veterans employed, 90 were sworn in as Police or

Protective Service Officers for Victoria Police, the remaining 18 were employed in a broad range of Government Departments and Agencies including: the Department of Justice, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; the Anti-Corruption Commission; State Trustees; Victoria Police VPS roles; and the Victorian Ombudsman.

19. Budget paper 3, page 104, mentions the creation of a veterans' major project employment initiative:

a) Is this initiative in the extension of the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, or likely to be a completely separate initiative?

Response: This initiative complements the Victorian Government's Major Projects Skills Guarantee in so far as it aims to support Victorian veterans with the information, training and support they require to secure jobs on Victoria's biggest building and infrastructure projects.

The initiative recognises the training, qualities and experience obtained in the Australian Defence Force, many of which are highly sought after in the construction industry – such as engineering skills and project management capabilities.

b) What links, if any, will there be between this initiative and the Prime Minister's veterans' employment initiative, administered federally through the Department of Veterans' Affairs?

Response: The Victorian Government's Public Sector Veteran Employment Strategy is independent of the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program, but the two initiatives are highly complementary. The Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program aims to highlight the value and experience of veterans to the private and public sectors. The Victorian Government initiative recognises the highly desirable skills and experience obtained in the ADF and aims to promote the employment of veterans in the Victorian public sector, including on major Government-funded infrastructure projects.

c) Page 53 of the Victorian Veterans Council Veterans Sector Study Report 2015, on the topic of employment for veterans, states that there is a 'lack of available Australian data on this topic', relying as it does on the data from the United States to discuss the issue of employment after a military career. How is the need for this initiative assessed, and what veteran employment targets relative to the rest of the population will be set for this initiative? How will we know if and when those targets are met?

Response: There is extensive research and anecdotal evidence about the challenges associated with transition, including employment. The Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade released a report in August 2017, following its inquiry into veteran suicide. The report examined the impact of transition and employment on veterans' mental wellbeing, and recommended that specific mechanisms be developed to increase participation of veterans in public sector employment. ESOs have also consistently reported on the need for employment opportunities for veterans that allow them to live with purpose and pride.

In developing this initiative, the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and Veteran Employment Advocate MAJGEN David McLachlan (Retd) have consulted with veterans looking for employment, veterans currently employed in the VPS, current service personnel, ESOs and a wide

range of Victorian government departments and agencies to promote the skills and experience of veterans and understand the challenges veterans face in seeking employment.

The BP3 target of 50 veteran applications for roles in the Victorian public sector was set in 2017-18. This target has been revised to 500 in 2018-19. DPC is required to report against this target annually. Furthermore, the Premier set a target in November 2016 to employ 250 veterans across the Victorian public sector over four years.

20. Budget paper 3, page 104, also mentions a four-year program for the provision of free public transport for veterans and other groups attending veterans-related events. Is that likely to be a refund-type model for public transport fares or will these groups carry some kind of identification on given days which will grant them free public transport?

Response: The logistics are still being finalised, but are likely to replicate those in place on ANZAC Day, where the arrangements are communicated by PTV to staff and authorised officers. To access free public transport on the designated days, eligible people must wear their uniform or service medals or ex-association badge or war widows badge or present a gold or white card or a PTV Veterans' card showing the letter 'V'. Australian Defence Force personnel, Cadets, Girl Guides, Scouts and school students must wear their uniform to access free public transport (including where the designated days fall on public holidays or weekends). These are the same arrangements as currently exist for ANZAC Day. This information will be communicated to the public in the period leading up to the commemorative days by PTV, and to the veterans sector via the Minister for Veterans' newsletter and through ex-service organisations.

21. Budget paper 3, page 299, shows a funding boost for support to veterans in Victoria of nearly 30 per cent relative to last year's budget total. Is this funding boost mostly due to timing around World War I centenary commemorations or are there other reasons for the timing of this funding boost? What outcome will result from this increase in funding?

Response: The increased funding is a result of a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of veterans in Victoria. The Government has increased its collaboration with the sector following the Victorian Veterans Sector Study Report 2015 and the Government's response to the Report. A number of areas have been identified as requiring greater support, including capacity building and training needs in the ex-service community, which received funding in the 2018/19 Victorian Budget. In addition, the sector is facing a shift in demography and sustainability challenges. There is a demonstrated need for the enhancement of ex-service facilities, greater support for veterans recently transitioned to civilian life, and the government is promoting opportunities to attract highly skilled veterans to take up residency in Victoria.