



Victorian Government Response to the Victorian Veterans Sector Study 2008

Introduction

The Victorian Veterans Sector Study was provided to the Premier, the Hon John Brumby, MP by the Victorian Veterans Council in 2008. The Study provided the Victorian Government with an overview of the state's veteran community and identified many of the challenges and opportunities for veterans and ex-service organisations.

Acknowledging that most areas of veterans' health and aged care support are the direct responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, the focus of the Study was on those areas that are the responsibility of the Victorian Government, either exclusively or in partnership with the Commonwealth.

The Study highlighted the challenges facing the veteran community over the next ten years, particularly around the impact of age, health, mobility, and declining veteran numbers. The Study made eleven recommendations for Government consideration across four major themes:

- The sustainability of ex-service organisations and options for support to build their capacity to meet veterans' welfare needs
- The well-being and social engagement of veterans and war widows
- The Victorian community's understanding of Australia's war-time history
- Improving collaboration throughout the veteran community by sharing information and better co-ordination.

The Victorian Government's is pleased to support all of the eleven recommendations and many of the specific actions suggested by the Council and has committed \$6.6 million over 4 years from 2009-2010 to support their implementation.

The Veterans Unit in the Department of Planning and Community Development, together with the Victorian Veterans Council, will continue to have responsibility to provide this support.

Recommendation 1: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government establish a comprehensive approach to assist ex-service organisations (ESOs) to sustain and/or develop their operations.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring Victoria's ex-service organisations (ESOs) have the information and support they require to respond to the changing needs of the Victorian veteran community.

The Victorian Government will appoint a Veterans Sector Development Adviser to support the Victorian Veterans Council to assist ESOs with their planning to ensure their sustainability and develop their operations where appropriate. We'll also develop and distribute a resource kit on issues such as managing succession and transition, available relevant services, grant opportunities to build capacity and advice on modernizing volunteering opportunities.

Recommendation 2: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government co-ordinate state-based services available to the veteran community, and review the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund to more effectively support ESOs in their provision of veterans' welfare.

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund, the primary Victorian fund available to support the welfare needs of veterans, remains relevant and has the capacity to support the Victorian Veteran community.

To enhance the effectiveness of the Fund, the Government will explore avenues for increasing the capacity of the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund. We'll also ask the Veterans Council to review the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund guidelines to ensure that they are more effectively targeted to support the welfare needs of veterans. A whole of government approach to the co-ordination of support provided to veterans by the Victorian Government will be promoted.

Recommendation 3: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government support patriotic fund holders and the veteran community to better understand patriotic funds and their use as appropriate under the *Veterans Act 2005* (Vic).

The Victorian Government recognises the need to improve information and advice to ESOs/Patriotic Fund Trustees around how patriotic funds can be raised and appropriately used, including transfer and winding up arrangements. The Sector Development Advisor will work in partnership with the Veterans Council and Consumer Affairs Victoria to conduct information sessions to support Patriotic Funds Trustees meet their aims and obligations.

We'll also develop a Question and Answer resource booklet on using, raising and reporting on patriotic funds under the *Victorian Veterans Act 2005*.

Recommendation 4: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government support ESO succession planning by providing access to information and professional advice on how to manage the legal, financial and other practical aspects of the process.

The Victorian Government recognises that with the ageing veteran population, and the declining number of volunteers, many ex-service organisations are planning to wind-up or merge with like-minded organisations.

The Veterans Sector Development Advisor will work with the Veterans Council and Consumer Affairs Victoria to develop an information booklet for ESOs on how to wind up operations, or merge with like-minded organisations if they choose to. This resource will also provide information on matters such as managing memorabilia, and merging or dissolving patriotic funds. Case studies of good practice, such as *Friends of the RSL*, would also be included.

Recommendation 5: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government, with the Commonwealth Government and ESOs, address the accommodation needs of the state's veterans, war widows and their dependants.

While responsibility for residential age care accommodation rests with the Commonwealth Government, the Victorian Government acknowledges the importance of working with the Commonwealth Government and ESOs to address the accommodation needs of younger and older veterans and war widows and to ensure specialist housing is available for particularly vulnerable dependents such as disabled children of ageing veterans.

In this regard, the Victorian Government will make up to \$2 million in funding available from the Victorian Property Fund to expand the supply of specialist housing to low-income or disadvantaged veterans and/or their dependants.

Recommendation 6: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government strengthen its effort to address the social isolation of older people, particularly older veterans and war widows, and facilitates access to Neighbourhood Houses, Men's Sheds and other similar community organisations.

The Victorian Government has identified social inclusion as one of its core priorities to improve wellbeing, and in particular to address disadvantage. In particular, this is a challenge in respect of an ageing population and the need to support strategies to address social isolation.

The Government will promote and facilitate access by veterans to:

- the Men's Sheds program, to which an additional \$2 million was committed in the 2009-2010 budget to construct additional Men's Sheds, bringing the total investment since 2007 to \$4 million;

- Seniors Registers – a \$1 million initiative to increase the number of older people registered who can be linked to volunteer support and local services, groups or activities in their communities;
- Universities of the Third Age (U3As) – a centrepiece for lifelong learning for older Victorians, enabling them to keep mentally alert and socially and physically active; and
- the Seniors Week Festival, and establishing a new Veteran Community Award.

Recommendation 7: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government improve the veteran community's access to broader community transport options, specifically helping ESOs who provide community transport to link with other community transport providers at a local level.

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of mobility for veterans particularly as they age, and are giving up driving. Familiarity with transport alternatives is important so that these alternatives are used confidently.

The Government in late 2008 announced that it will invest a further \$80 million in the Transport Connections program to continue to help local communities in outer suburban, regional and rural areas to trial innovative responses and identify ways to better use existing private, public and community transport resources. Information on the current 32 Transport Connection partnerships around the state will be made directly available to ESOs and the wider veteran community to aid them to participate and access the program.

The Government does not support further extension of the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) beyond those veterans who are currently eligible, based on a social need alone. Veterans who have a permanent disability which severely limits mobility and prevents the use of public transport can access the MPTP at present and eligibility is available to all Gold Card holders. In late 2008, the Government also doubled the MPTP annual subsidy cap to \$2180 and individual trip caps to \$60 to assist MPTP users to be better connected to their family and community. Veterans with an Extreme Disability

Adjustment (EDA) or Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) endorsed pension are excluded from the annual subsidy cap.

Recommendation 8: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government address existing anomalies in relation to veterans' concessions and supports consistent eligibility for concessions across Australian states and territories.

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of ensuring there are fair, equitable and consistent concessional arrangements in place for veterans and war widows across Victoria, and where possible across the nation.

The Government will extend the municipal rates concession from July 2009 to all Prisoners of War (POWs) and those who are extremely disabled. We will also work with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments towards achieving reciprocal concessions across Australia. From January 2009, all states and territories (other than WA) have agreed to reciprocal transport for all Seniors Card holders, which includes many veterans and war widows.

The survey work undertaken by the Veterans Council on Victorian local government concessions will be shared amongst all councils so that councils, where appropriate, can choose to introduce new concessions to veterans and war widows.

Recommendation 9: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government strengthen its current education programs to inform the community about the contribution of veterans in their service to the nation, with new initiatives in the lead up to the Centenary of ANZAC in 2015.

The Victorian Government has prioritised the importance of educational opportunities, particularly for younger generations, around Australia's war-time history as we head towards the Centenary of ANZAC in 2015. This includes the Premier's Spirit of ANZAC

Prize and Study Tour for Year 9/10 students along with a variety of programs delivered by the Shrine of Remembrance.

Currently, the Government is capturing the unique stories held by Victoria's veterans through the Digital Story Telling project, in partnership with ACMI and the Shrine of Remembrance, as well as digitising military unit histories and ensuring they are readily available on relevant websites.

The Government will ask the Veterans Council to analyse those community education programs that relate to the ANZAC Spirit and Australia's war-time history and to develop strategies to improve coordination and the targeting of commemorative and education grants provided through the Veterans Fund.

In 2009 the Government will also pilot a Spirit of ANZAC teachers' study tour to Gallipoli and the Western Front battlefields and develop materials to support school curriculum. The Victorian Government will also be working closely with the Commonwealth Government along with other States and Territories around planning for the Centenary of ANZAC.

Recommendation 10: The Veteran Council recommends the Victorian Government take action to strengthen the role of the Shrine of Remembrance.

The Victorian Government has long recognised the valuable role that the Shrine of Remembrance plays as a focus for commemoration and increasingly in educating the community about our war-time history and its impact. This has included support for the development of Shrine Visitor Centre and the creation of Education Centre in 2005.

The Government acknowledges that there has been a significant increase in visitors to the Shrine and students engaging with their educational programs over recent years. Consequently, in the recent 2009-10 state budget, an additional \$3 million has been

allocated to the Shrine over the next four years to ensure that the Shrine is placed on a more sustainable financial footing. This brings the total annual allocation of funds for the Shrine to over \$2 million a year.

Recommendation 11: The Veterans Council recommends the Victorian Government take action to improve the knowledge and understanding of the veteran community about available programs and services to support the needs of veterans and their dependants.

The Victorian Government recognises that navigating through the range of federal, state, local government, and community organisation services and programs can at times be difficult and confusing.

The Victorian Government, with the support of the Veterans Council, will undertake further work with both the Commonwealth Government and ESOs to improve the knowledge and understanding of available programs and services within the veteran community. This work needs to build on the support already provided by the Commonwealth through their Training and Information Program (TIP) and the activity of Veteran Support Centres, run by the RSL and VVAA, which already receive financial support from the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund.

Specifically, the Government will develop a Veterans Concessions brochure to improve the understanding of veterans of concessions available at a state or local government level.

The Government, through the Veterans Council, will also conduct regular forums bringing ESOs and service providers together to share information. Where practical these will be conducted with the support of Veterans Support Centres.