12 June 2019

Mr G Hughes MP
The Chair
Social Services and Community Committee
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

By email: ssc@parliament.govt.nz

Tēnā koe Mr Hughes

Re: Veterans’ Support Amendment Bill (No 2)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Veterans' Support Amendment Bill (No 2).

Our Role

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry and addiction, supports clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and addiction and advises government on mental health care.

In New Zealand, Tu Te Akaaka Roa – New Zealand National Committee, represents the RANZCP by advocating and working to improve the mental health of our community by collaborating with a range of stakeholders including NGOs, other health organisations and Government agencies. The RANZCP has recently established a Bi-national Military, Veterans’ and Emergency Services Personnel Mental Health Network to improve mental health outcomes for service members and veterans. The RANZCP’s position statement calls for the ‘provision of effective, accessible and appropriate support over the lifetime of current service members and veterans’ and we consider this Bill supports our objectives.

RANZCP's Support for Bill

The RANZCP supports the principles outlined in the Bill. We understand the key tenets of the Bill are to implement the findings of the Paterson Report. We note that the Paterson Report highlighted that many veterans ‘wanted more support for veterans in crisis, particularly those with post-traumatic stress injury and other mental health conditions’.

We are pleased to note that the Bill provides for greater recognition of the ‘psychological illness’ experienced by veterans and that Veterans’ Affairs New Zealand will be able to fund private mental health services for veterans until eligibility for public services is established. This policy will reduce bureaucratic complexity increasing the system’s efficiency to address veterans’ mental health and addiction needs in a pro-active manner.
The Bill also recognises that alcohol misuse is a condition that requires attention and treatment.

**New Section 28 (2) (a) the illness is itself a psychological condition (for example, alcohol use disorder) that was attributed to or aggravated by the experiences of the veteran during qualifying operational service**

The Paterson Report highlighted a range of exclusions facing veterans when applying for support including an injury or illness "caused by or significantly aggravated by" alcohol use.

S. 28 (2) (a) amendment removes those exclusions or limitations on entitlements. This is more a holistic approach to determining “illness” and accepts that a psychological condition may include alcohol use disorder. We welcome this amendment as evidence indicates that many veterans experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and may use alcohol and other substances to self-medicate to reduce their symptoms associated with their ongoing psychological distressiii.

**New Section 108 (a) Urgent treatment of mental injury or illness**

We note that the Paterson report made recommendations to “Intervene sooner and faster”. We tautoko the sentiments in the Paterson report that ‘prompt assessment of the veteran’s physical and mental health needs is necessary, followed by rapid access to mental health and addiction support’. S. 108 (a) addresses the issues raised in the Paterson Report as this section allows veterans to seek assistance for a mental injury before their application has been completed by Veterans’ Affairs. We contend that this amendment will support prioritising early identification to minimise the number of veterans requiring serious interventions later in life and reduce the burden on the veteran care system.iv

We fully support this approach as research indicates that with mental health or addiction conditions early intervention is critical in reducing ongoing sequela and supporting recoveryv.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bill. We warmly welcome these amendments as we contend this Bill will improve the mental health and addictions outcomes for veterans.

We have developed four policy platforms – one of the key messages is “Not forget the 5%” who are the most vulnerable people in our community, who live with enduring mental health presentations. Veterans are often living with complex mental health problems, overlaid with substance misuse and may potentially have physical injuries that impact on their mental health. For this reason we support legislation that works to support more equitable mental health and addiction services for veterans.

We do not wish to appear before the Social Services Select Committee. If you have further questions please contact Rosemary Matthews, National Manager, New Zealand, on 04 472 7265 or by email Rosemary.Matthews@ranzcp.org.

Nāku, na

Dr Mark Lawrence FRANZCP  
Chair, New Zealand National Committee – Tu Te Akaaka Roa

**References**


