

VETERANS' ADVISORY BOARD

Hon Meka Whaitiri
Minister for Veterans
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Tēnā koe Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with an update on the work the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) have been doing towards a Kawenata.

A Kawenata is a mechanism designed to clearly articulate the, to date, largely unwritten moral obligations to service people and their whānau. Its purpose is to celebrate the spirit of our nation and to ensure that service people and their whānau are treated with fairness and respect and that they are not disadvantaged because of their service.

In 2020, the VAB conducted a national conversation to assess New Zealander's appetite for recognising and valuing the service of our men and women. We wanted to gauge whether there was a consensus to commit to a moral obligation to recognise and support our service men and women and their whānau, while they were serving and after they had left the service. In this conversation we raised the opportunity to develop a Kawenata that would formally enshrine our commitment to this recognition and support.

While the numbers that participated in the national conversation, through focus groups and surveys, were not large, they were sufficient for us to conclude that there was strong support for us as a country to make a moral obligation to recognise and support our service men and women. We concluded we should pursue the development of a Kawenata.

At that stage you invited us to engage with our counterparts in other countries. The VAB consequently reviewed the Covenants that exist in Australia, and the United Kingdom including Wales, in order to consider what might work best for Aotearoa New Zealand. This review process confirmed the good sense of developing and implementing our own Kawenata.

The United Kingdom chose to formalise their obligation in legislation, Australia chose to use policy statements. We believe that the legislative approach is appropriate and would be more meaningful for New Zealand.

Both countries provide support for service men and women and their whānau during their time in service, which continues after they leave. We support this approach. We noted that their respective defence forces provide the primary services during service, as is their obligation. They both take a whole of government approach to require all government agencies have responsibility to provide appropriate services to this group once they have left the service.

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We endorse the Policy Framework you have recently released and the work Veterans Affairs is doing to enable the Ministry of Health to take up the responsibility to provide mental health services to those in need after they have left the service. The Kawenata would encourage/require other government agencies to follow suit.

The United Kingdom and Australia both agree that support services provided should be no less than to those provided to the rest of the population and that in no way should service men and women be disadvantaged. There will special circumstances where additional support is required, when it is directly attributable to their service.

Both countries described the challenges they had in obtaining and providing good information about this cohort and the need for more research into their specific needs.

They were also confident that we would be able to attract businesses, community groups, iwi, local and regional government bodies and individuals to commit to the Kawenata and provide supplementary recognition and support.

Finally, both countries endorsed the importance of having a comprehensive and robust transition process to assist in the adjustment from life in the service to that in the community.

We think there is enough here to guide us in shaping a suitable Kawenata for New Zealand and in our view, now is a good time to begin the next phase.

We would welcome your direction to play a role in the next phase.

Contact details

If you should have any questions please contact the Acting Board Secretary, Jennifer Locke on jllocke@allenandclarke.co.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



Leith Comer, QSO
Chairperson

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