



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
Wellington Mail Centre
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New Zealand

OIA-2024-4969

17 April 2024

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 19 March 2024 regarding assistance provided by Veterans' Affairs (VA) New Zealand. With reference to the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Annual Report 2023, you noted *that requests for assistance from veterans increased by 30% in the 2022/23 period. I'd like to get some more specific information on this - could you provide the number of requests for claims for the last five years, in the format you record them. Also any information you have on changes to the system meaning it'd be opt out rather than opt in.* Your request has been considered in accordance with the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

The NZDF Annual Report 2023 states (emphasis added): *During 2022/23 finalisation of veterans' claims was slowed by extended waiting times for specialist assessments and medical reports, **along with over a third more claims being submitted compared to the last financial year.***

This statement concerns the total number of conditions claimed, not the number of requests for assistance. The data that informed that statement was only generated for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years and is provided below:

Financial Year	Number of Conditions Claimed
2021/22	2,216
2022/23	3,251

With respect to applications, there may be several hundred applications being processed at any one time where the application is incomplete. Applications are not added to VA records until it is confirmed that all the required information is available. The following application data is provided for your information.

In November 2021, it was announced that two new conditions had been added to the list of prescribed conditions for which Vietnam veterans are eligible for ex gratia payments under the Vietnam Veteran Memorandum of Understanding. This resulted in over 1,000 applications being received, over and above regular claims. More information about this is available on the VA website: www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/news-events/articles/more-vietnam-veterans-will-become-eligible-for-an-ex-gratia-payment/

The Veterans' Independence Programme (VIP) provides services, such as house cleaning and lawn mowing or garden maintenance, which help veterans maintain their independence. Although the primary function of VA is to provide support to veterans who have been

injured or made ill as a result of their service, the Veterans' Support Act 2014 also allows VA to offer these services at its discretion to veterans who do not have a service-related injury or illness.

The following table shows the number of clients receiving at least one VIP service over the previous five financial years. Some clients are added to the list each year and some come off, but the general trend can be seen.

Financial Year	Total no. clients receiving VIP
2018/19	4,572
2019/20	5,306
2020/21	6,682
2021/22	7,758
2022/23	8,060

Recently, VA decided to pause the arrangement of any new discretionary VIP services (for veterans without a service-related condition), to allow VA to focus its resources on improving the waiting times for applications for rehabilitation and treatment from veterans who have an injury or illness which results from their time in service. Further information about the decision to suspend the programme for new clients without a service-related condition, and information about processing times for claims, is available on the VA website.

With respect to your request for information on changing VA processes to *opt-out rather than opt-in*, no relevant information was found. This part of your request is therefore declined in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that responses to official information requests are proactively released where possible. This response to your request will be published shortly on the NZDF website, with your personal information removed.

Yours sincerely

AJ WOODS

Air Commodore

Chief of Staff HQNZDF