



RSL Victoria State Executive Communique

Friday 27 March 2020

COVID-19 Response

RSL Victoria established an Incident Management Team at ANZAC House on the 16 March to manage the ongoing crisis. This team, led by our new Chief of Veteran Services (Adam Lawson), have done an outstanding job handling the operational response to COVID-19. The majority of the State Branch staff are now working remotely and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. ANZAC House has been closed to non-essential activities for the last week and will fully close to the public today.

RSL Victoria will continue to deliver essential veteran welfare and advocacy despite the closure of ANZAC House. Sub-Branches will continue to be supported in managing their day to day operations.

Sub-Branch Support

Due the current social and financial pressures placed upon the RSL Victoria network, the State Executive considered and approved several initiatives focused on the COVID-19 response to support Sub-Branches. The following decisions were made:

\$500,000 10B and 10C Sub-Branch financial assistance grant

- A one off \$500,000 financial assistance grants program for 10B and 10C Sub-Branches from the RSL Vic State-wide Patriotic Fund. Any Sub-Branch with a patriotic bank balance of less than \$10,000 may apply for a grant. These grants of between \$3k-\$5k will assist Sub-Branches with the payment of immediate and non-deferable fixed costs during this time of hardship. The CEO will manage this grant program and provide more information in the coming days. Further assistance grants may be considered in the future.

Pausing of all loans, interest and rental charges

- To further support Sub-Branches, all loans, interest charges or rental paid by any Sub-Branch to the State Branch or internal between Incorporated and Patriotic Funds within a Sub-Branch will be paused effective if 26 March 2020. This is applicable to all Sub-Branches and will be reviewed as the situation evolves. We believe that this initiative will also support Sub-Branches manage their immediate cash flow issues.

\$4,000,000 10A Sub-branch Commercial Operations Assistance

- Distribution of the Future Assistance Fund will provide \$4,000,000 to support 10A Sub-Branches manage the financial impacts of COVID-19 to their commercial operations. The Future Assistance Fund is an account that the 10A Sub-Branches have been paying into since 2012 to support them with future financial challenges.

- A sub-committee of the State Executive will be formed to decide how the money will be equitably distributed to ensure as many 10A Sub-Branches remain financially viable during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

State Branch

In light of the COVID-19 situation the State Executive has asked the CEO to present an adjusted 2020 budget to the State Executive at our April meeting. The CEO will continue to manage the day to day affairs of the State Branch and take actions he considers appropriate. There may be many challenging decisions ahead and we thank the CEO for his calm and focused leadership.

The State Executive also asked the CEO to consider how the whole RSL could make better use of the total resources available in these challenging times.

Veteran Services

These challenging times have reinforced the importance of the RSLs core objectives. To provide support to our veterans and the commemoration of service.

The majority of the RSL veteran support, including advocacy and welfare, in Victoria is delivered through the Sub-Branch network. We know that that will be challenging in these times. The RSL Victoria Veteran Services team has quickly adjusted how it operates to work with the Sub-Branches and where needed take on these roles on behalf of a Sub-Branch if needed.

During the last week the Veteran Services staff have reached out to all Sub-Branches and individually to over 450 veterans across the state to determine support requirements. At the moment the Sub-Branches are reporting that they have their areas in hand. We expect that as unemployment increases and social isolation continues that some Sub-Branches will be unable to continue their local support and the demands on Veteran Services staff will increase significantly.

To support Sub-Branches and an anticipated larger number of individual cases the Veterans Services team has created of a centralised 'veteran call centre' approach. This approach enables the triaging of support requirements and will assist remote working practices. The team has also been in regular contact with other Ex-Service Organisations to ensure we are working together better.

We know that with reduced revenue from this year's ANZAC Appeal and an expected increase in support requirements that welfare funds will be tight. The budget this year allocated \$9,330,000 to Veterans Services which included \$4,200,000 for direct welfare payments. This was based on an anticipated \$3,500,000 in revenue from the ANZAC Appeal. The Veterans Services team has been asked to consider clear criteria for provision of that support so that

the maximum amount of support can be provided from the State Branch and across the whole network.

The government has confirmed that the provision of veteran welfare and advocacy is an essential service. The state and federal governments have been in regular contact with RSL Victoria to confirm their support for this vital role that the RSL performs.

Anzac Day Events

A modified approach to ANZAC Day will be conducted this year. The State Executive affirmed that it was more important than ever to commemorate the sacrifice and service of the veteran community. The times make it challenging for many reasons and the safety of our members and the community must come first though. To that effect the State Executive decided that:

- There are to be no RSL organised public services, commemorations, breakfasts, lunches or other activities conducted on ANZAC Day in Victoria. Every care should be taken to follow social distancing rules and stay at home unless absolutely necessary.
- The ADF has confirmed that no support is possible to ANZAC Day Services this year.
- RSL Vic will support and promote a nation-wide campaign focused on the ANZAC Spirit with the taglines #ANZACspirit and #StandTo. This features a community, 'stand in your driveway at dawn' campaign. It's a great way for the whole Victorian community to commemorate ANZAC Day and show their support for veterans.
- RSL Vic are working closely with the ANZAC Day Commemorative Council and the Shrine of Remembrance to facilitate a 6am televised, virtual and streamed closed service at the Shrine of Remembrance. The focus of the Victorian service will be the Governor and contemporary veterans. It is a chance for us all to reflect on the true meaning of ANZAC Day.

ANZAC Appeal

A modified approach to the 2020 ANZAC Appeal will be conducted this year. The times make it challenging for many reasons and the safety of our members and the community must come first though. To that effect the State Executive decided that:

- There will be no hand to hand on-street sale of badges this year.
- Woolworths and Officeworks will still sell ANZAC badges as normal. The State Executive also asked how we can get badges to people who may not have money spare to purchase this year and the Appeals team is working through how that may be done.
- RSL Vic are supporting a nation-wide digital fundraising campaign. This is being done predominately in cooperation with the New South Wales and Queensland RSL Branches, supported by RSL Australia.

Committee Elections and Branch and Sub-Branch Meetings

COVID-19 has impacted on the conduct of committee and Sub-Branch meetings. The secondary effect of this is that it means that holding Annual General Meeting's and completing elections has been impacted (which includes the State Executive election which has been called). The CEO will write to Sub-Branches in the near future setting out how Sub-Branch meetings and elections will be done/finalized.

The CEO will also develop options for this year's State Conference and State Executive Elections in light of COVID-19 and the subsequent social distancing rules in force. We are confident that procedure, rule and regulatory issues can be worked through and thank everyone for their patience while we do that.

Other Matters

In principle approval was provided by the State Executive as a trustee of the Ringwood RSL Sub-Branch Patriotic Fund to proceed with the development of the Sub-Branch Patriotic Fund property. This development presents a good opportunity for Ringwood to restructure their operations and develop new revenue streams into the future.

The State Executive approved Bacchus Marsh RSL Sub-Branch to incorporate as Bacchus Marsh RSL Sub-Branch Inc.

The State Executive approved RSL Victoria Inc to apply to join the National Redress Scheme as a group on behalf of the League in Victoria. The National Redress Scheme is an outcome of the Royal Inquiry into Institutional Child Abuse.

The State Executive deferred non-urgent matters, such as disciplinary and administrative items to a future meeting.

As President of RSL Victoria I'd like to acknowledge and offer a special thanks to the staff at RSL Vic for their continued dedication to delivering veteran and family welfare services during this incredibly difficult time. To all Sub-Branches, I wish you well and know that working together as One RSL we will get through this and come out the other end stronger than ever.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Robert Webster OAM
State President