

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA  
VICTORIAN BRANCH INC.  
ABN 73 941 765 364 REG NO A0028777L

PATRON: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN  
STATE PRESIDENT: DR ROBERT WEBSTER OAM



## **RSL Victoria State Executive Communique**

### **Tuesday 14 April 2020**

I write to you after what I know has been another challenging period for everyone. With most of our time now spent in our homes, it's even more important for us all to stay connected and support one another. Staying connected is paramount – so please reach out to your family, friends and the network if you need any extra support.

On Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April the State Executive held an out of sessions board meeting to be updated on RSL Victoria's response to COVID19 and to consider important matters ahead of our next planned monthly meeting on 30 April.

#### **COVID-19 Response**

Our priority, as always, is to ensure veterans and their families can access the support they need. The support being provided by RSL Victoria and all the Sub-Branches during this difficult time only reinforces how strong and connected the network is. The RSL Victoria Veteran Services team have continued to contact veterans - checking in and offering help, advice or just a friendly voice to chat too. The team has also contacted all Sub-Branches to check on their welfare and offering any assistance as they in turn support their veterans.

After the Victorian Government enacted Level 3 COVID-19 restrictions, all State Branch staff moved to working remotely from Monday 30 March. Arrangements made in the week prior to this announcement meant we are well placed to be able to continue to support our veteran community and Sub-Branches over the coming weeks and months.

#### **RSL Victoria Budget**

The CEO presented COVID19 3 and 6 six-month budget scenarios for the State Executive to consider. The presentation included immediate budget initiatives already implemented by the CEO and staff.

In developing a new budget, the key budget principle has been to ensure that the Veterans Services team is prioritised, service delivery maintained, and where appropriate increased. All other discretionary operational expenditures for the remainder of the financial year has reduced and the budget recut to drive for the same year end position as the approved February budget. Additional saving initiatives included a temporary voluntary 20% pay cut for the Executive Leadership Team. A small number of State Branch staff who could not work from home or be meaningfully redeployed have been stood down.

The State Executive endorsed the adjusted budget and requested that the CEO present a further budget update at the May meeting. The May update will consider broader scenarios around COVID-19 and associated government stimulus packages such as the Coronavirus Economic Response Package (Payments and Benefits) Bill 2020 announced by the Federal Government the day prior to the board meeting.

The State Executive thanked the RSL Victoria Executive Leadership Team for their leadership and outstanding work over the last month.

### **\$500,000 Distribution to Sub-Branch Agency (Welfare) Accounts**

The CEO provided a briefing on the distribution of welfare funds to Sub-Branches to support them to deliver support at the local level. An initial \$300,000 will be paid directly to Sub-Branches that have historically delivered the largest amount of benevolent veteran activity from their Agency Patriotic Funds. Those Sub-branches will be informed this week with funds to be transferred as soon as possible.

A further \$200,000 is available upon application by any Sub-Branch who can demonstrate a welfare need. Applications for these additional funds can be made direct to the CFO. The RSL Victoria Veteran Services Call Centre remains available to provide direct support to veterans on behalf of Sub-branches or by direct approach by veterans and their families seven days a week. Phone (03) 9655 5555 or email [Veteranservices@rslvic.com.au](mailto:Veteranservices@rslvic.com.au)

To support Sub-Branches in ensuring financial support goes to where it is most needed, a benevolent veteran (and dependent) welfare guidance document will be distributed to Sub-branches. The intent of the guidance is to help sub-branches in their decision making when disbursing welfare funds from their Agency account. Sub-branches should also be mindful of working in cooperation with existing Government support arrangements. If a Sub-Branch is uncertain of assistance measures available through the federal or State governments, call the RSL Victoria Veteran Services Call Centre for guidance.

### **Future Assistance Fund**

A paper was presented to the State Executive to assist them in prioritising and distributing moneys from the Future Assistance Fund to 10A Sub-branches. The Future Assistance Fund is an account set up by 10A Sub-branches in 2012 to provide for future gaming transition costs and/or unforeseen financial circumstances requiring access to it. The funds have been paid over that time via a daily levy against each Sub-branches electronic gaming machines.

Applications will be sought from Sub-Branches and reviewed based on the following factors;

- Financial Capacity of the Sub-Branch
- Sub-Branch Performance in meeting the objects of the RSL
- Strategic considerations

The State Executive agreed that the State Executive Future Assistance Fund Sub-Committee will meet in the next two weeks to consider applications made for accessing the FAF to ensure that the money is equitably distributed.

### **ANZAC Appeal**

As you know, this year our ANZAC Appeal will be conducted online via our secure and easy to use donation website, [anzacappeal.com.au](http://anzacappeal.com.au). The Appeals team recently sent an email to Sub-Branches with important updates and developments on the online campaign. A selection of digital resources will be provided to Sub-Branches this week. Sub-Branches are encouraged to support the central RSL Victoria digital ANZAC Appeal.

Badges are available for purchase from Woolworths from 15 April at the service desks. There should be no face to face selling of badges this year by Sub-branches unless badges were already at point of sale in your local community. Advice is being sought from the Department of Health and Human Services about if community badge sales are permitted and if so under what circumstances given that it is against Victorian law to be outside for purposes not expressly permitted.

## **ANZAC Day**

While ANZAC Day will also look different this year, it will not stop us re-affirming our commitment to commemoration and the ANZAC spirit. There will be streaming on [Facebook](#) of a single Dawn Service at the Shrine of Remembrance, however the public will be asked to stay at home. The Service will be mostly pre-recorded with a live wreath laying component featuring the Governor and a contemporary Victorian veteran. The Department of Health and Human Services had provided its approval for this two-person ceremony.

RSL Victoria is asking the whole Victorian community to #standto on April 25 and #LightUpTheDawn. At 06:00 ANZAC Day stand in your yard, driveway, or on your balcony and observe a minute of silence in respect for our veteran's past and present. All RSL State Branches are working together on this national campaign to amplify the ANZAC Day message this year and we encourage Sub-Branches to support this effort. Sub-branches are reminded that local services are not permitted this year.

## **Beaumaris Patriotic Fund Transfer**

The State Executive considered a proposal from RSL Victoria for the transfer of Patriotic funds from the Beaumaris Sub-Branch Patriotic Fund to other Sub-branches. This transfer would enable non-Patriotic funds to be distributed in support of Sub-branches with outstanding loans to RSL Victoria. After considerable debate the State Executive did not approve the proposal. In principle support was provided for the transfer of funds for direct patriotic/veteran purposes but more work is required before progressing this option, including further engagement with all Sub-branches involved.

## **Camberwell Administrative Decisions**

The State Executive endorsed the CFO to engage an auditor of the Camberwell Sub-Branch and appoint additional signatories to the bank accounts of the Camberwell Sub-Branch.

## **RSL Victoria Culture**

In the context of the current COVID-19 crisis, the State Executive noted that it is now more important than ever to work together to achieve positive outcomes for veterans and their families. The State Executive committed to engaging as much as possible with all sub-branches to achieve these outcomes.

Unfortunately, there have been instances of poor behaviour in some parts of the RSL over the last few weeks that diminish the outstanding work everyone is doing. The State Executive considered options in how to respond to specific instances of behaviour not in keeping with the rules and values of the League and society. The State Executive reiterated its expectations that all communication and interactions between members of the RSL (be that staff, volunteers or general members) must be respectful and courteous. Bullying and harassment within RSL Victoria will not be tolerated.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Robert Webster OAM  
State President