

RSL VICTORIA

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



RSL
Victoria

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER, ALWAYS.



RSL
Victoria

2020
ANNUAL REPORT

OUR APPROACH TO REPORTING

RSL Victoria's 2020 Annual Report outlines our performance in 2020 and reports on our organisation's charitable and commercial elements.

Managing the impact of COVID-19, has been and continues to be, a challenge for RSL Victoria with many of our activities significantly altered or paused as a result of the pandemic. We have given much thought and focus on how to articulate the pandemic's impact in this report.

Our report has been created with multiple stakeholders in mind, including veterans and their families, members, staff, partners and kindred organisations. This report also serves as an introduction to our organisation for potential new stakeholders and partners. We acknowledge that at times RSL Victoria can appear to be a complex organisation, and we have worked to include more infographics and data than in previous reports, as we hope that this will help develop greater understanding of our organisation.

The 2020 Annual Report is intended as an overview and introduction to RSL Victoria. Our full audited financials can be found on the RSL Victoria website.

CONTENTS

ABOUT US 8

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 9

WELCOME 10

From Our State President 10

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE 12

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 18

Financial Snapshot 20

DIRECT VETERAN SUPPORT 23

Resilient Veteran Strategy 23

New Support For Veterans 26

RSL Wellbeing 30

RSL Advocacy 33

RSL Welfare 35

Veteran Centres 38

RSL Active 40

FUNDRAISING 46

ANZAC and Poppy Appeals 46

Gifts in Wills 49

OUR IMPACT 50

COMMUNICATIONS 54

Commemoration 56

105th Annual State Conference 75

SUB-BRANCH SUPPORT SERVICES 76

GOVERNANCE 80

RSL Victoria Leadership 80

State Executive Attendance 85

AWARDS 87

Sub-Branches That Celebrated

100 Years in 2020 88



ABOUT THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA BRANCH)

ABOUT US

RSL Victoria is an ex-service organisation and charity, that was founded in 1916 to provide comradeship and support to Australia's veterans and their families.

OUR MISSION

To provide the best possible support & services to all generations of veterans in Victoria.

OUR VISION

Every veteran in Victoria is respected & supported, together with their families.

OUR VALUES

Empathy, Tradition, Integrity, Mateship, Transparency, Compassion, Respect.

OUR HISTORY

The Returned & Service League of Australia (Victoria Branch) was formed in June 1916 by troops returning from WWI with the purpose of preserving the spirit of mateship formed amidst the carnage and horror of battle, to honour the memory of the fallen and to help each other whenever required.

The underlying philosophy of the League is mateship and this is as true now as it was in 1916.

In 1916, there was no formal government welfare service for veterans and the RSL committed itself to providing for the sick, wounded and needy among those who had served including their dependants.

The RSL was instrumental in creating:

- a Commonwealth repatriation system
- service, disability and war widow pensions
- various employment and retraining programs (and for many years operated its own employment bureau)
- child health programs
- vocational guidance services.

In effect, the RSL was the first national welfare agency in Australia and welfare remains our prime function today.

OUR ORGANISATION TODAY

Although our core mission has never changed, the RSL's role has evolved over the past century.

Today our role is:

- Policy development and public advocacy on behalf of the Returned and Services League (the League) and our members
- To promote, protect and shape the reputation and public perceptions of the League
- Communications
- To deliver and lead veteran services
- Commemoration
- Governance, compliance and risk management leadership
- Fundraising
- Sub-Branch and member support and advice
- To authorise the establishment and dis-establishment of Victorian RSL Sub-Branches
- Leadership in living the values and culture of the League.

NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTION RSL VICTORIA STRATEGY 2019-2023

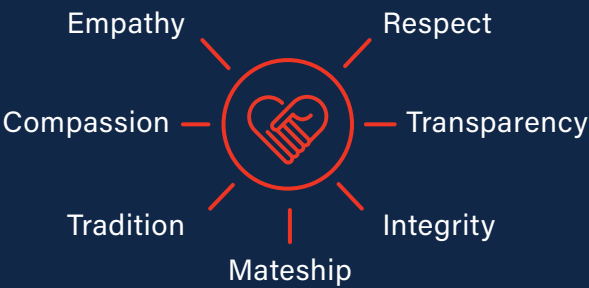
Vision

Every veteran in Victoria is respected & supported, together with their families

Mission

To provide the best possible support & services to all generations of veterans in Victoria

Values



Our Objectives 2019-2023:

1. Engage more effectively with veterans who have served since 1990
2. Attract more veterans who have served since 1975 to be become involved in the active work of the RSL
3. Deliver two major projects, Project 2020 and Project 2022, in an integrated way with a narrative that articulates their inter-dependence and mutual support
4. Successfully developed and implement new and enhanced fundraising strategies and methods
5. Optimise and sustain our strategic footprint across the State
6. Ensure our governance is effective, transparent and contemporary
7. Enable all our objectives with modern IT and digital platforms to share, manage and inform

Pillar One GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE



- Build on work already undertaken
- Highest practical level of compliance & risk management
- Reinforce a core culture of governance excellence to Sub-Branches and other State Branches

Pillar Two DELIVERY SERVICES TO VETERANS



- Develop, enhance & continue to deliver services to Veterans with diverse & individual needs
- Service delivery will grow and be adaptive
- We will embrace technology and innovation and work with other ESOs and charities to achieve best outcome for the Veteran.

Pillar Three THE RSL BRAND



- Our RSL name & badge are prime assets, of which we are custodians
- We will assertively & succinctly articulate our role in society and proudly celebrate our achievements
- Sub-Branch veteran and community outcomes will be clearly evident
- The community's expectations of a contemporary charity will be met

Pillar Four CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE



- Review & modify our rules and by-laws to facilitate the best achievement of our mission.
- Our organisational structure will be reviewed & modified to reflect the changing needs & expectations of our stakeholders & to deliver our strategic initiatives

Pillar Five BUSINESS MODEL



- The RSL will be agile & innovative in supporting Sub-Branch commercial operations
- We will maximise our fundraising earnings
- Our asset base will grow and be enhanced in accordance with our risk matrix
- We will attract, retain and develop a highly engaged team and impart professional development into our Sub-Branch network



2020 was a year of great challenge, but also great triumph.

WELCOME. **FROM THE STATE PRESIDENT,** **DR ROBERT WEBSTER OAM**

I am pleased to present the 2020 Annual Report. Marked by a public health emergency, 2020 was a year of great challenge, but also great triumph as our community – the staff, volunteers, and members of the RSL – came together and demonstrated an extraordinary level of adaptability, innovation, and resilience in supporting the Victorian League throughout the pandemic. Again RSL Victoria proved itself a leader within the ex-service community, evolving services and finding new ways to support and connect with veterans when traditional face-to-face contact was no longer an option; and through leading online commemoration of ANZAC Day, the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific, and Remembrance Day.

Throughout the year RSL Victoria also provided an enormous amount of advice and support to all classes of Sub-Branch, helping to ensure that the network survived the year with few Sub-Branch closures. The year also saw RSL Victoria's 105th Annual State Conference, at which it was my great honour to be re-elected by the membership to the position of State President for a third term. As I said at the State Conference and re-iterate now, my goal in my third term is to continue to lead the State Executive, Sub-Branches, and staff of the RSL in Victoria, with a focus on veterans and a mind to continued innovation and growth throughout the League.

I thank my colleagues on the State Executive – in particular Mr John Cullen OAM, who after decades of support formally retired from the State Executive at the close of the State Conference – for their commitment to the betterment of the League. I also thank the CEO, Executive Leadership and staff at RSL Victoria, who throughout 2020 demonstrated an unshakable commitment to RSL Victoria. It is truly humbling to work alongside these committed and wonderful individuals.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Webster".

Dr Robert Webster OAM
State President

THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

OUR APPROACH

All Victorians have felt the impact of COVID-19, and as the largest ex-service organisation (ESO) in Victoria, the leader of commemoration for the state, a membership organisation and a contributor to the hospitality industry, RSL Victoria has had to make many difficult decisions during 2020.

But, by entering the pandemic in a strong financial position and through responsive and thoughtful management of resources and staff throughout 2020, RSL Victoria is positioned to rebound well from the pandemic.

Following is a summary of the steps we took to ensure that RSL Victoria would be able to continue to meet the needs of our community, including veterans, their families and Sub-Branches and staff, throughout the pandemic.



OUR INITIAL RESPONSE

On Monday 16 March 2020, a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria and the first COVID-19-related lockdown would soon follow. At this time RSL Victoria was busy finalising plans for ANZAC Day and beginning the ANZAC Appeal fundraising period, arguably our biggest commemorative and fundraising events of the year. While the business needed to devote energy to pivoting ANZAC Day and the ANZAC Appeal to be compliant with lockdown restrictions, it also needed to rapidly put supports in place for the ongoing support of RSL Victoria staff, Sub-Branches, and the Victorian veteran community.

RSL Victoria's initial response to the unfolding pandemic in Victoria was the formation of the Incident Management Team (IMT). The IMT brought together staff from every part of the organisation to work together and lead the RSL Victoria response, including how we would manage the impact this situation would have on the RSL network and our community.

During the first weeks of the unfolding pandemic, the IMT executed:

- daily communications sent to RSL Victoria staff with relevant updates on working arrangements and the COVID-19 situation, support and guidance
- IT training for staff, and the deployment of new IT hardware to enable staff to work from home

- daily communications sent to Sub-Branches; relevant to their By-laws — 10A, 10B or 10C. Daily communications included general updates on the situation, links to official health information, operational advice and resources.
- creation of an RSL Victoria COVID-19 call centre to ensure that veterans needing assistance, who could not be reached through online platforms, would be connected with existing services and local Sub-Branches. Where a Sub-Branch might not be in a position to provide services due to the COVID-19-related restrictions, RSL Victoria would provide this assistance
- RSL Victoria staff re-deployed to the call centre also began calling all Sub-Branches to check in and assess the Sub-Branches' capacity to support their members and the wider veteran community. Where Sub-Branches did not have capacity, RSL Victoria stepped in to provide supports.

Meanwhile, RSL Victoria marketing and communications staff worked with ANZAC Day Commemoration Council (ADCC) volunteers, the Shrine of Remembrance and the Victorian Government to deliver an ANZAC Day like no other, and lead the state in commemoration from home through the Light Up the Dawn campaign.

The same staff played a key role in pivoting RSL Victoria's fundraising efforts for the ANZAC Appeal, implementing new digital strategies to attract donors.



ONGOING MANAGEMENT

Impact on staff

As the lockdown wore on, through March, then April and into May it became clear that despite RSL Victoria's strong financial position going into the pandemic, the scale of the crisis would mean that the organisation would need to find ways to decrease spending.

Much of RSL Victoria's yearly outgoing expenses are spent on employee salaries, reflecting the nature of the organisation whereby professional staff deliver services that support veterans and the League. RSL Victoria staff are employed by one of two entities – either the General Appeals Patriotic Fund (GAP Fund) or Victoria Branch Inc. (Victoria Branch). GAP Fund employees work in roles directly related to supporting veterans and their families. Where Victoria Branch employees, who are paid from commercial revenue, perform operational roles associated with administration, governance, finance, commercial operations, marketing and communications, human resources, and leadership. The need to reduce costs as commercial revenue fell was seen in a decrease in spending from the Victoria Branch.

From the beginning of April 2020, executive staff took a voluntary 20 per cent pay cut. At the same time, due to a significant loss in commercial income, RSL Victoria stood down a number of Victoria Branch staff in office-based roles that could not be transitioned online. A number of redundancies were also made. RSL Victoria was able to keep the majority of Victoria Branch staff throughout the pandemic; this was achieved through a combination of government wage subsidies via the Federal Government's Jobkeeper payments, and by reducing the hours of Victoria Branch employees to 0.8 FTE from July 1 until December 2020.

While spending from Victoria Branch was reduced, the pandemic highlighted the need to increase RSL Victoria's services for veterans and their families, leading to the recruitment of nine new GAP Fund-funded staff. GAP Fund employees worked in a full-time capacity through 2020, and RSL Victoria also received JobKeeper payments for these employees.

Supporting our staff through change

As the Victorian Government enforced lockdowns in the early phase of the pandemic, and then again through the middle of 2020, RSL Victoria's staff needed to move to remote working practices, which prompted RSL Victoria to formalise wellbeing activities for staff as follows:

- RSL Victoria's initial response to the pandemic was to send daily communications to staff with updates on the pandemic.
- Daily emails then moved to a weekly 'Checking In' email. The first official edition was sent on 9 April, shortly after the first Victorian lockdown. These emails included wellbeing tips and information. The emails also included messages from the CEO, State President, Human Resources and other teams wanting to share news and updates.
- Meanwhile, RSL Victoria fast-tracked the development of a staff intranet, named the 'Staff Hub'. The Staff Hub served two purposes — 1) a centralised resource hub with staff forms, policies and procedures and 2) a place for staff and teams to share news and updates.
- Eventually, after 26 'Checking In' emails, RSL Victoria moved to the 'Weekly Wrap Up' emails — a weekly email to link staff to all the news from the newly created Staff Hub.
- Since the Staff Hub launch on 30 September 2020 there have been more than 50 posts on the Hub and an average of 48 views per post.
- RSL Victoria also encouraged staff and teams to use Microsoft Teams for fortnightly staff presentations. Staff presentations were a great way for staff to connect and share news and updates, as due to the pandemic informal and in-person collaboration was not available for much of 2020. All up there were 28 staff presentations made from April to December.

RSL Victoria gave further support to staff during the pandemic by contracting the services of a new Employee Assistance Provider (EAP): Uprise.

Uprise is an online EAP that provides staff with a flexible online platform to support wellbeing and resilience. Key to the platform is the ability for staff to access online modules that encourage wellness and wellbeing. The platform also gives staff the option of engaging in professional counselling services. More than 30 per cent of all employees signed up to use Uprise's services during 2020.

Support for Sub-Branch committees and managers

RSL Victoria plays a significant role in the ongoing governance and support of the RSL Sub-Branch network throughout Victoria. This has traditionally been done through regular face-to-face activities undertaken by RSL Victoria staff and elected members of the RSL Victoria State Executive. With face-to-face support disallowed for much of 2020, maintaining a connection with Sub-Branches became a communications opportunity and challenge. It was from this that the eNews platform was created.

- The regular communication sent through the eNews included messages from the State President and Chief Executive Officer; news, updates and resources from a variety of Business Units and Departments throughout RSL Victoria; and announcements and reminders for a range of activities (both internal and external).
- In 2020 Sub-Branch Presidents, Secretaries, and General Managers received 16 editions of the eNews and an additional two special editions for VP Day and Remembrance Day, which included resources to support Sub-Branches with their commemoration and fundraising activities.
- Communications that fell outside of the eNews schedule that were time-sensitive were sent separately to ensure Sub-Branches received relevant and important information in a timely manner.

Support for By-Laws 10A, 10B and 10C Sub-Branches

Ensuring that the RSL Sub-Branch network would survive 2020 with few RSL Sub-Branch closures was a priority for RSL Victoria throughout 2020.

Specific support for By-Law 10A Sub-Branches

Through 2020 RSL Victoria provided ongoing support, advice and guidance for 10A Sub-Branches throughout the varying circumstances of 2020. Despite the reality of government-mandated closures for large portions of the calendar year, the support and advice provided to By-law 10A Sub-Branches was arguably of its highest volume and of most critical importance. Telephone, electronic and, where permitted, face-to-face support for Sub-Branch committees and General Managers in navigating the many complexities of staff stand downs, operational closures, re-start preparations, and supporting external supplier liaison.

Specific support for By-Laws 10B and 10C Sub-Branches

By-laws 10B and 10C Sub-Branches raise funds through the annual ANZAC and Poppy Appeals to support veterans and their families with benevolent welfare and to ensure the continuation of Sub-Branches facilities. Due to the pandemic, RSL Sub-Branches would be unable to fundraise for the ANZAC Appeal as they normally would. In response RSL Victoria made funds available to support essential Sub-Branch maintenance and repairs and to provide emergency assistance to veterans in need. More than \$400,000 was granted to By-Laws 10B and 10C Sub-Branches for maintenance and repairs, and more than \$300,000 for By-laws 10B and 10C Sub-Branches to provide emergency assistance to veterans and their families.

GREATER SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

RSL Victoria has traditionally operated a face-to-face model for veteran support; however, the pandemic made this very challenging during 2020.

RSL Victoria’s initial response to the pandemic saw the creation of an RSL Victoria COVID-19 call centre to ensure that veterans needing assistance, who could not be reached through online platforms, would be connected with existing services and local Sub-Branches. As the pandemic wore on, the call centre model became essential for providing support to all Victorian veterans and their families. It was through this model that RSL Victoria was able to continue our core wellbeing, welfare and advocacy services.

In September of 2020 RSL Victoria formally created the 1300MILVET call centre and Veteran Central (VETCEN), which is a program to provide holistic support to veterans and their families.

During the pandemic, RSL Victoria also transitioned our flagship wellbeing program – RSL Active – online. RSL Active hosted 200 online activities for veterans and their families in 2020.

Activities included:

- yoga
- personal training sessions
- guitar lessons
- zumba classes
- art therapy.

More than 700 veterans participated in the online RSL Active program.

Acknowledging our Volunteers

Data from the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods (CSRM) has suggested that voluntary work was impacted harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than paid work was. This was certainly felt by RSL Victoria as due to COVID-19 restrictions and we saw a significant reduction in time donated by volunteers during 2020.

RSL volunteers are some of the most amazing people you’ll ever meet. Not only have many given through Australian Defence Force (ADF) service, but they chose to continue to give through their involvement with the RSL. With an unbreakable connection to the Defence family, and a strong sense of altruism, our volunteers are truly inspiring. Due to the pandemic, many of our volunteers were unable to volunteer their time to RSL Victoria and the veteran community as they normally would; however, we would still like to take this opportunity to thank our regular volunteers and say that we hope to see them back and doing what they love to do in 2021.

The impact of COVID-19 on our volunteers

Activity	2019	2020
Hours given to providing Sub-Branch administration and management	111,156	60,962
Hours given for providing support for the annual ANZAC and Poppy Appeals	38,658	5,887
Hours given for providing support to local community events and initiatives	29,761	11,279
Hours dedicated to commemorations and heritage project	25,989	6,420
Hours given to providing compensation advocacy	43,103	24,722
Hours given to the coordination of DVA Day Club activities	14,522	1,965
Hours given to providing wellbeing support for veterans	6,916	2,780
Hours given for Women’s Auxillary	47,103	24,086



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 will be a year that few will forget.

For RSL Victoria, the pandemic impacted the Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) finances significantly. The finances of RSL Victoria are represented by five entities:

- Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Inc.
- RSL Victoria General Appeals Patriotic Fund
- RSL Victoria House Building Fund
- Returned & Services League of Australia Statewide Building Patriotic Fund
- Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Welfare Trust Fund.

The 2020 audited financial statements for the five entities referenced above and below are available on the RSL Victoria website.

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA BRANCH) INC.

Spending and income associated with the Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Inc. is directly related to the operations of the State Branch. This entity finished the year with a total revenue of \$3,675,168 including \$1,251,416 raised from the 10A Sub-Branch RSL Operational Support Fee (OSF)*. The OSF was suspended from March 2020 as the pandemic forced the closure of traditional commercial hospitality operations in Victoria. OSF payments recommenced in November 2020. Employee benefits paid from this entity totalled \$4,050,795 and the (Victoria Branch) Inc. received \$795,150 of government assistance via the Jobkeeper payments. A loss of \$1,629,250 was incurred in 2020; this loss reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional revenue streams.

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA BRANCH) GENERAL APPEALS PATRIOTIC FUND

Spending an income associated with the Victoria Branch's General Appeals Patriotic Fund is associated with providing funding and support to veterans and their families. This entity finished last year with a total revenue of \$5,498,428; this amount included \$2,623,028 raised through the ANZAC and Poppy Appeals and a \$1.5 million donation from the Victorian State Government. Employee benefits totalled \$3,135,378; this is an increase of \$698,822 reported in 2019 and, in part, reflects the recruitment of eight new staff to this entity in 2020. This entity also received \$985,800 in Jobkeeper payments. The entity spent \$892,603 on benevolent welfare for veteran and their families. RSL Victoria's General Appeals Patriotic Fund reported a profit of \$311,926 in 2020, compared to a \$866,000 loss in 2019.

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA STATEWIDE BUILDING PATRIOTIC FUND

The Returned & Services League of Australia Statewide Building Patriotic Fund provides funds RSL Sub-Branches and other building patriotic funds to perform essential maintenance. This entity reported a total revenue of \$713,690 in 2020, and the total equity in the fund is \$10,080,551. In 2020 the building fund reported a loss of \$93,373 compared to profit in 2019 of \$285,698. Part of the loss can be attributed to COVID-19 support grants that were paid from this entity to a number of 10B and 10C RSL Sub-Branches for essential maintenance and repairs to club rooms.

*The Operational Support Fee (OSF) paid by 10A Sub-Branches to State Branch on a per Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) per day basis.

RSL VICTORIA HOUSE BUILDING FUND

The RSL Victoria House Building Fund is the owner and operator of ANZAC House, 4 Collins Street Melbourne. In 2020 this entity made a loss of \$411,980 compared to a loss of \$354,884 in 2019. The losses incurred in 2020 are in part owing to the impact of COVID-19 on rental income. The total equity in this entity is \$22,420,713.

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA STATEWIDE BUILDING PATRIOTIC FUND

The Returned & Services League of Australia Statewide Building Patriotic Fund provides RSL Sub-Branches and other building patriotic funds to perform essential maintenance. This entity reported a total revenue of \$713,690 in 2020, and the total equity in the fund is \$10,080,551. In 2020 the building fund reported a loss of \$93,373 compared to profit in 2019 of \$285,698. Part of the loss can be attributed to COVID-19 support grants that were paid from this entity to a number of 10B and 10C RSL Sub-Branches for essential maintenance and repairs to club rooms.

RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA BRANCH) WELFARE TRUST FUND

RSL Victoria's Welfare Trust Fund provides funds to support veteran causes that can be of both an benevolent and non-benevolent nature. In 2020 this entity reported a total revenue of \$26,379. The fund reported a total expense of \$690,091 for the year. Equity in the welfare trust Fund is \$4,658,278.

FINANCIAL
SNAPSHOT

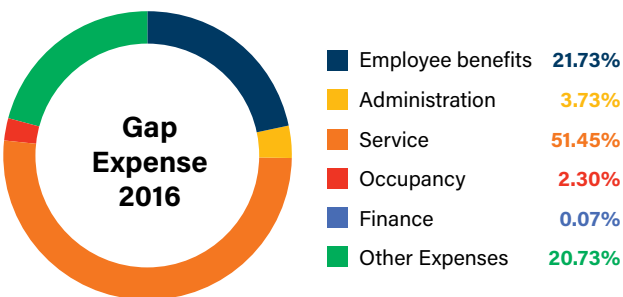
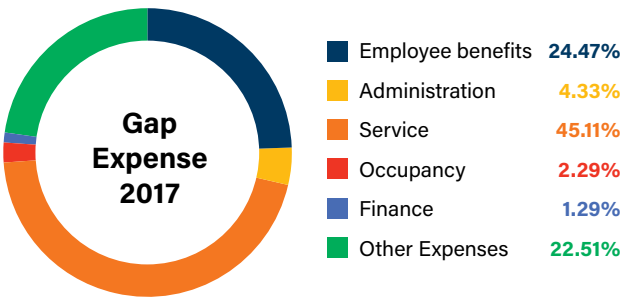
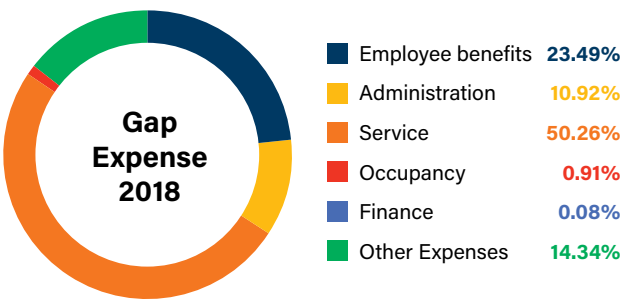
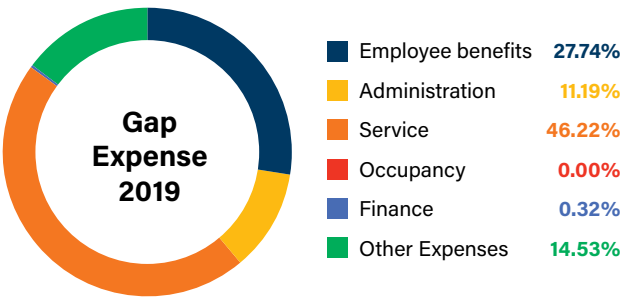
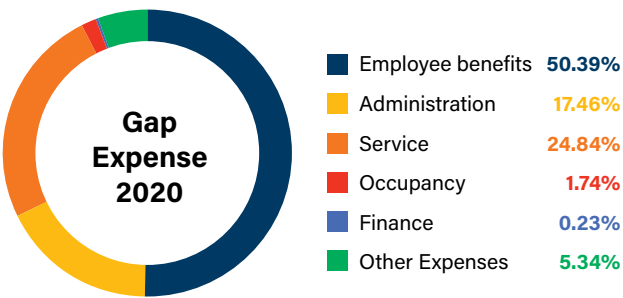
RSL Victoria’s mission and strategic priorities guide our delivery of services and supports.

RSL Victoria is focused on balancing services and supports with financial sustainability. RSL Victoria’s State Executive and leadership team work collaboratively to explore innovation and alternative funding models that might enhance our service delivery outcomes; this is something that RSL Victoria has had a long commitment too.

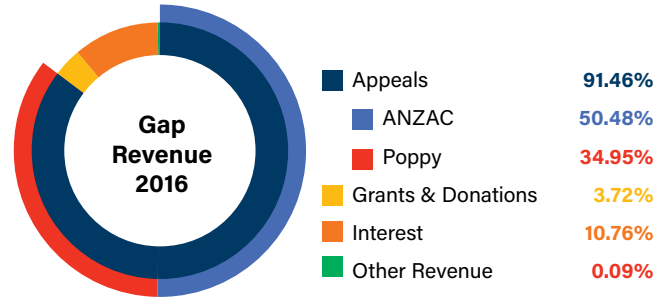
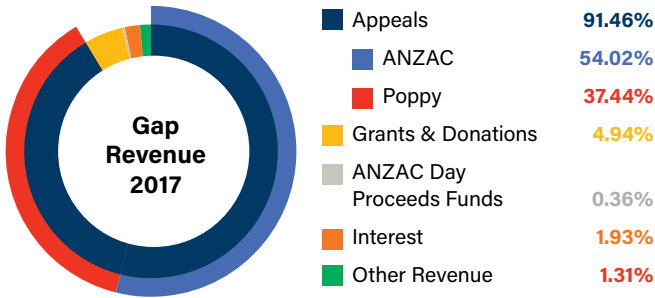
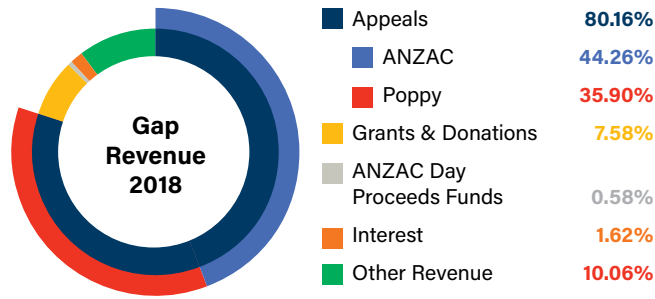
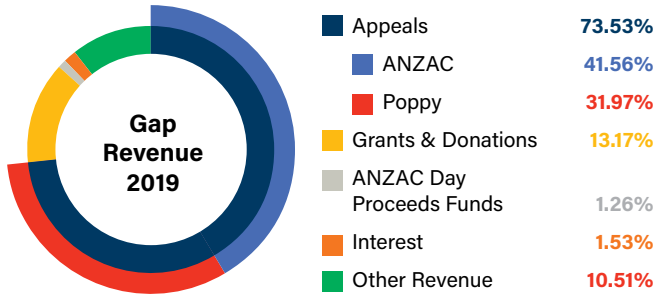
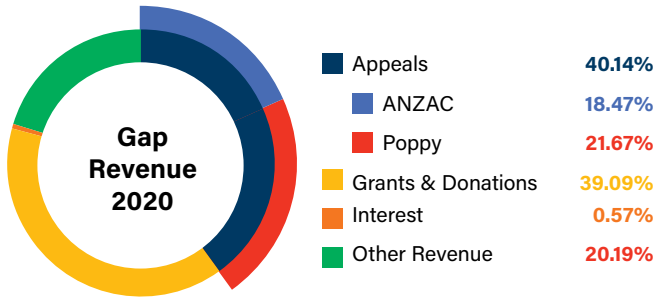
COVID-19 could have had a devastating impact on RSL Victoria, but it is through our prudent financial management both before the pandemic and during it that RSL Victoria is in a position to make a strong rebound.

To demonstrate this, we have included a five-year snapshot of the financial positions (revenue and expenses) of the *Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch)* and the *General Appeals Patriotic Fund* and the *Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Inc.*

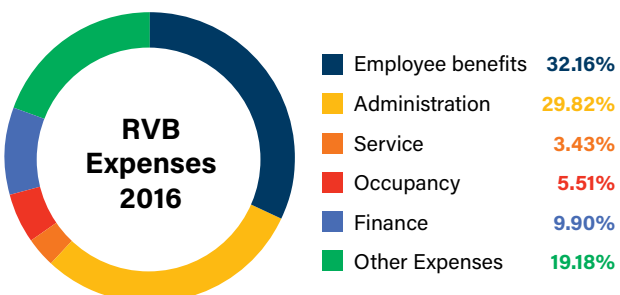
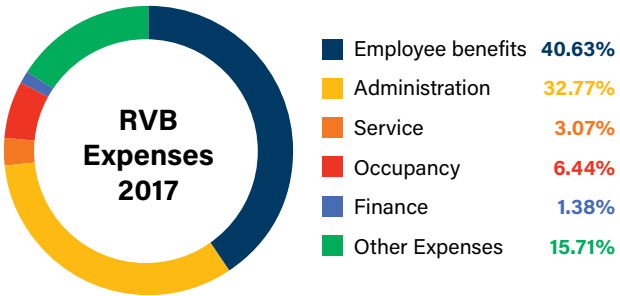
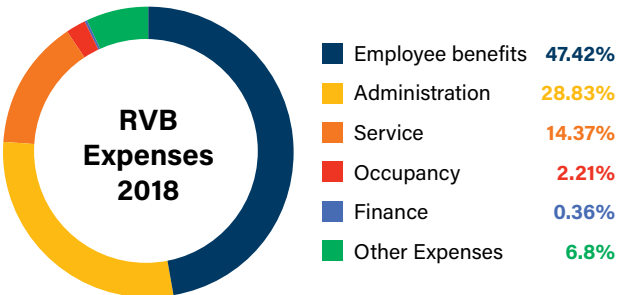
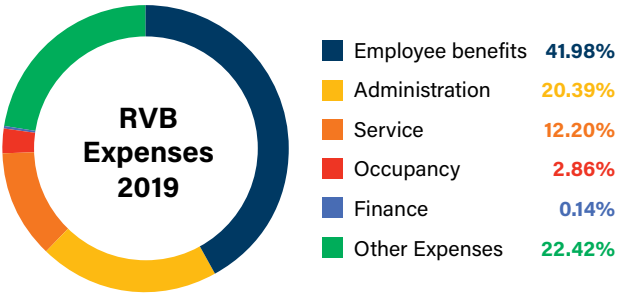
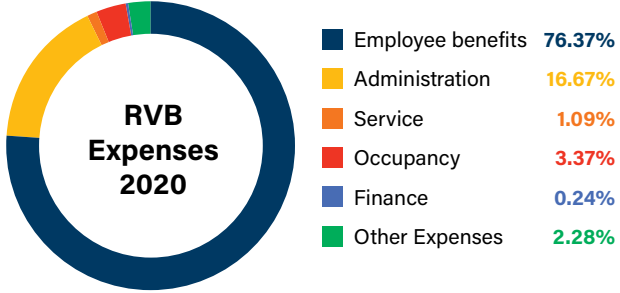
GAP EXPENSES GRAPHS 2020 TO 2016



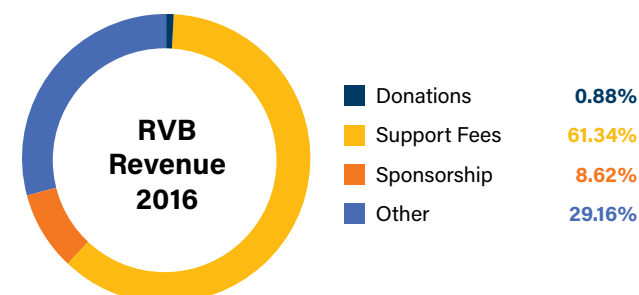
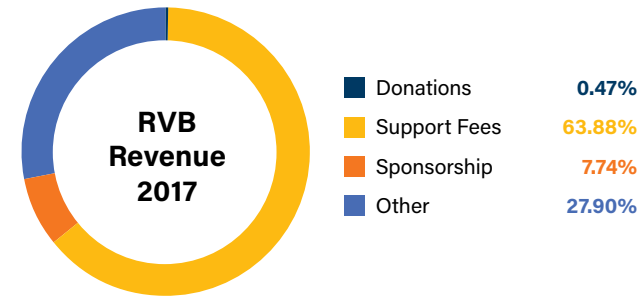
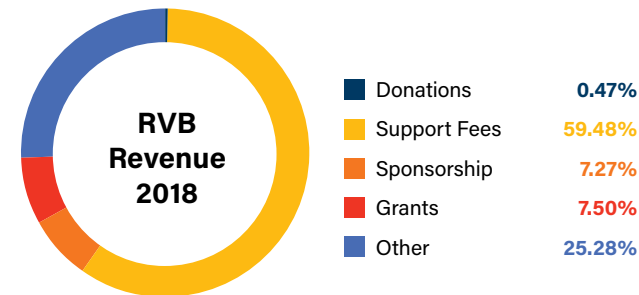
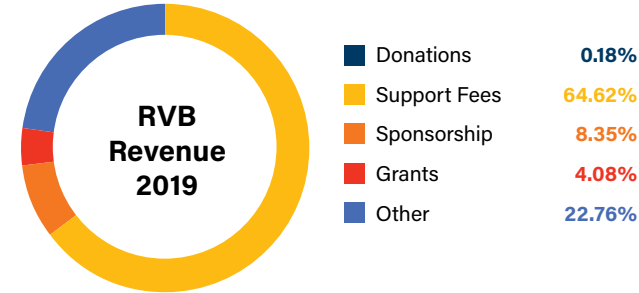
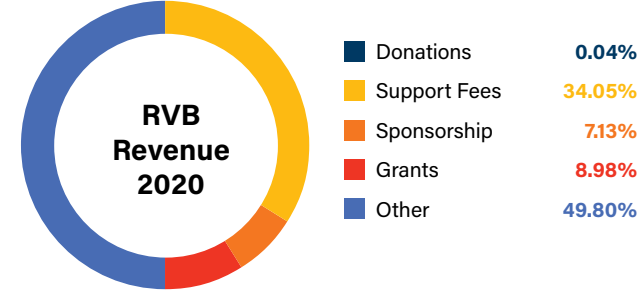
GAP REVENUE GRAPHS 2020 TO 2016



RVB EXPENSES GRAPHS 2020 TO 2016



RVB REVENUE GRAPHS 2020 TO 2016



DIRECT VETERAN SUPPORT



It is our mission to support veterans and their families when in need. Traditionally, we have done this through the provision of welfare, wellbeing and advocacy support.

In 2020 RSL Victoria began a process of evolving our veteran supports, and the newly formed Veterans Services Directorate is a direct result of this. Services and supports offered through the directorate are best practice, evidence-informed and offered in collaboration with government and other ESOs.

The goal of the new directorate is to support veterans and their families to live their best lives through the provision of holistic care. In 2020, in addition to providing welfare, wellbeing and advocacy support, the veteran services directorate also launched a new strategy for veteran support and two new programs – VETCEN and 1300MILVET. Under this directorate, both RSL Active and the Regional Veteran Centre project have evolved throughout 2020.

RESILIENT VETERAN STRATEGY

For over 100 years, RSL Victoria has been improving the lives of veterans and their families by providing advocacy, wellbeing and welfare support. In 2020 RSL Victoria undertook a strategic review of our veteran services that has led to the creation of the Resilient Veteran Strategy 2021–2026.



ADAM LAWSON
CHIEF OF VETERAN SERVICES
FOR RSL VICTORIA

Consistent with the RSL’s vision of evolving to meet the changing needs of each generation of servicemen and women, RSL Victoria has developed what the organisation is calling a “bold strategy” to take the lead and central role in providing veteran wellbeing services.

The new Resilient Veteran Strategy 2021–2026 aims to build on RSL Victoria’s strengths and allow for collaboration and partnership with others who offer what the RSL does not or cannot deliver.

Adam Lawson, the Chief of Veteran Services for RSL Victoria, says, “The RSL has adopted a process definition of resilience. This means we define resilience as the protective factors and mechanisms that contribute to a good outcome, despite life challenges.”

RSL Victoria aims to foster the resilience of every Victorian veteran and their family so they can meet the challenges that take place during transition and throughout their life journey.

Adam says the Resilient Veteran Strategy is “a roadmap for how we can provide services and be consistently available to veterans and their families to get the help that they need to lead their best lives.”

He says the concept is a ‘no wrong door’ approach.

“A veteran or their family can contact the RSL through walking into an RSL Sub-Branch or a veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre, or through contacting RSL Victoria’s VETCEN program via 1300 MILVET (1300 645 838). Whatever way they enter the system, the veteran should expect that we will be able to provide them with a consistent level of service and help.”

The Strategy incorporates eight elements of wellbeing for veterans and their families, such as education, employment, and social support. It aims to strengthen mechanisms that support these areas, including where these are provided by RSL Victoria or other ESOs.

The Strategy also looks at the different needs of veterans throughout their life journey, from joining and serving in the ADF, to transitioning out of the ADF, living a civilian life and through retirement and aging.

Core to the strategy is the desire to provide holistic support that acknowledges the complex interplay between physical, mental and social supports needed to support veterans and their families to thrive in their post-service lives.

The strategy also provides direction for the evolution of veteran services and supports across the RSL Victoria network.

RSL Victoria’s Chief of Veteran Services, Adam Lawson, discusses the new strategy and how it is evolving the way the RSL delivers support to veterans.

There are four objectives of the Strategy: to show collaborative leadership within the ESO community; to focus on connections as the RSL’s central contribution to veteran wellbeing; to work in an evidence-informed way; and to work with veterans across their entire lifespan.

An Action Plan will be developed, and programs related to the objectives of the Strategy are in development.

The Strategy has been through a broad consultation process with Sub-Branches as well as non-RSL-aligned veterans and other ESOs. The completed Strategy is due for release in July 2021. Every Sub-Branch has been invited to participate in online briefing sessions and provide feedback. Adam says it has been overwhelmingly well received so far.

“Everybody I’ve spoken to and we’ve engaged with sees the sense and utility of it and are 100per cent enthusiastic.”

Adam says it’s pleasing to see the benefits of centralised systems in place already. He says since the establishment of VETCEN, RSL Victoria has at least 60 new contemporary veterans contacting the RSL monthly.

“So, by providing leadership, we are working with other ESOs to make sure the veterans get the help they need.”

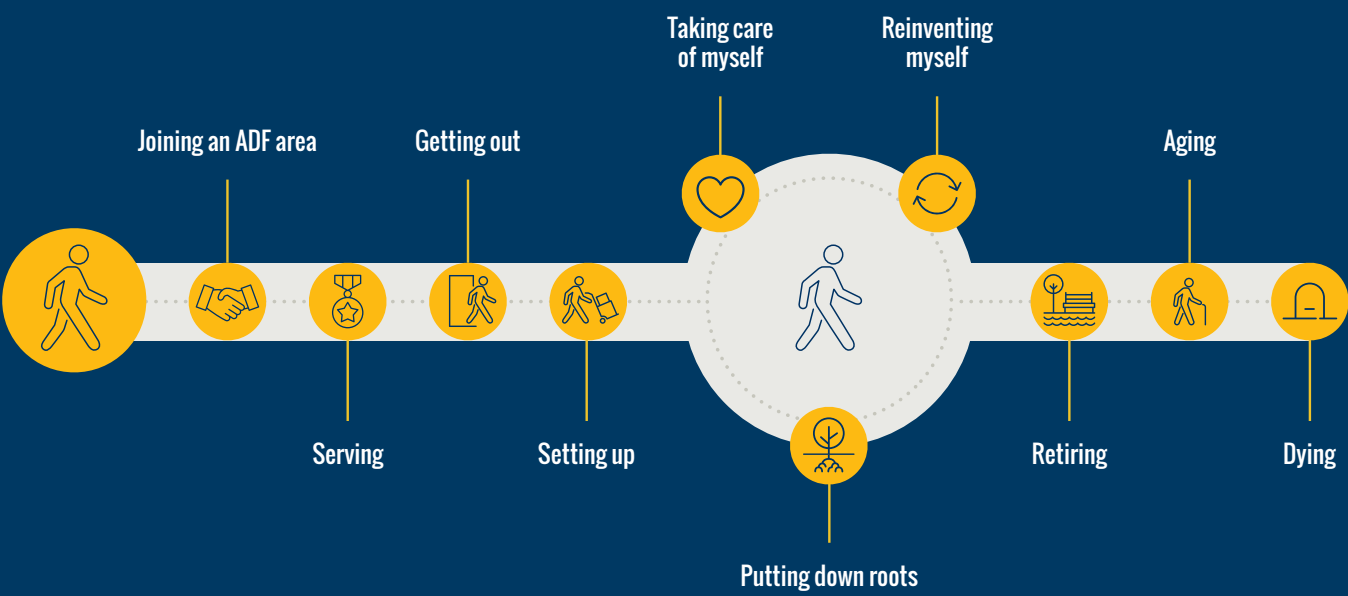
OUR VISION

The resilience of every Victorian Veteran and their family equal to any challenges that take place during transition and throughout their life journey.

OUR MISSION

To empower Victorian veterans and their families with connections and wellbeing choices that enhance their capacity to prosper in all life circumstances.

VETERAN JOURNEY MAP



OUR STRATEGIES

The Resilient Veteran Strategy will operate around four central strategic themes to provide cohesive wellbeing support for the veteran at all life stages; connecting them to one of the many support services offered by RSL Vic, one of our partner organisations, or to a veteran-focused government department.

- 1 COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP** Lead cross-sector engagement to unify wellbeing supports that reflect the diverse needs of Victorian veterans and their families.
- 2 CONNECTIVITY** Proactively empower veterans and their families to attain a place of connection and belonging within the veteran and general community.
- 3 EVIDENCE INFORMED** Provide Victorian veterans and their families with access to credible, safe, and effective wellbeing support and service navigation.
- 4 LIFELONG COMMITMENT** Proactively create and maintain a supportive, trusted and enduring relationship with Victorian veterans and their families.

NEW SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

The year 2020 brought great change to RSL Victoria, especially in our veteran support services, with the launch of two new initiatives: Veteran Central (VETCEN) and RSL Employment.

VETERAN CENTRAL (VETCEN)

In June, 2020 RSL Victoria began trialling a new call centre model with the intention of making access to RSL support during the pandemic easier for veterans and their families. This model was well received by the Victorian veteran community, and in September 2020, RSL Victoria launched our new veteran support service, VETCEN.

The mission of the VETCEN service is to simplify and streamline access to welfare and wellbeing support services from RSL Victoria, government, other ex-service and community organisations for veterans and their families. A key feature of the new VETCEN service is the 1300MILVET (1300 645 838) phone number. 1300MILVET is a 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, call centre service for veterans and their families to contact for immediate holistic care. RSL Victoria has gone to great lengths to ensure that support from this service would be appropriate and holistic through recruiting new specialised staff, and providing additional training to staff re-deployed to work on the service. Training areas include:

- elder abuse
- domestic violence
- suicide prevention
- occupational violence
- in 2021, 1300MILVET staff will undertake ATDP compensation advocacy training, further expanding their skill set.

The operating model for 1300MILVET is based on industry best practice. When a veteran or the family member of a veteran calls the service, their call is answered by an intake officer who can offer support for simple enquiries. If the enquiry is complex, the caller is connected with a case navigator specialising in offering support that may involve multiple programs and providers. Case navigators are experts in connecting veterans and their families to all available supports, whether from RSL Victoria, government, other ESOs, or through community groups, such as Housing Choices Australia.

RSL Victoria is proud to be leading VETCEN and 1300MILVET. By acting as a centralised intake point, and working closely together with government, ESOs and community groups, RSL Victoria is delivering better support to veterans and their families.

From its launch in September of 2020, to the end of the Annual Report reporting period in December 2020 — the VETCEN service has:



672

Received 672 unique calls and emails requesting support

4,540 calls
5,697 emails



Recorded more than 4,540 phone calls and 5,697 email interactions with veterans as the service helped navigate veterans through the supports available to them.



2,458 calls

Of this 2458 phone calls related to compensation advocacy from both new and existing clients.

\$155,443.20

Through VETCEN \$155,443.20 in financial assistance to veterans and their families has been processed — including grants for accommodation, debt relief, education, food, funeral, legal aid, medical, recreation, removal costs, travel, utilities and vehicle costs.



10,053



11,621

Since the call centre trial began in June 2020, a total of 10,053 calls and 11,621 emails have been recorded by Veteran Services Directorate staff.

\$100,000



The new VETCEN service was made possible by an initial grant of \$100,000 from the Victorian Government.

VETERAN CENTRAL

VETCEN IS A PLACE FOR ALL VICTORIAN VETERANS

Get the support you need to maintain your wellbeing. VETCEN is staffed by Case Navigators who will work directly with you to find and link you to supports that are available. This might be within RSL programs, our Ex-Service Organisation community, or help navigating the DVA system or Commonwealth aged care system.

📞 1300MILVET (1300 645 838)

✉️ veteranservices@rslvic.com.au



RSL
Victoria

VETERAN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

In October of 2020, RSL Victoria launched a new veteran employment program as part of a national initiative to offer holistic support services across the country. RSL Employment supports veterans and their partners to find meaningful employment. The program also offers career and financial counselling, interview coaching, and mental health support services to veterans and their families.

The employment program, is funded by the Australian Government and has been successfully running in Queensland since 2018 after a successful pilot by RSL Queensland.

For many, finding meaningful employment is essential, but this is especially true of veterans and their families, as employment can greatly assist with the transition into civilian life. RSL Victoria is proud to have brought this program to Victoria. We know it is going to have a significant and positive impact on the wellbeing of many Victorian veterans and their partners.

From the launch of the program to December 2020, three veterans have successfully gained life-changing long-term employment through the program.

SERVICES



Help translating your skills for the civilian job market



Help interpreting selection criteria, writing CVs and application letters and social media profiles



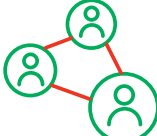
Interview coaching



Career counselling



Training and development



Connections to employers

RSL Employment

Helping write your next chapter

The right role can give you purpose and direction. It can help you grow and develop in a fulfilling career. And it can help you transition into civilian life or settle in after relocating.

The RSL Employment Program supports veterans and Defence partners in their search for meaningful employment.

Funded by the Australian Government.

FIND OUT MORE
rslemployment.com.au



**RSL
Victoria**



For RSL Victoria, supporting the wellbeing of veterans and their families is about providing supports that make a difference to one's body and soul.



RSL Victoria supports wellbeing by offering veterans and their families programs that reduce social isolation, encourage mateship and provide direct financial assistance to veterans and their families when in need.

With the creation of the Resilient Veterans Strategy, RSL Victoria has formalised our wellbeing model, and is actively evaluating current programs and building new ones to contribute to greater wellbeing for veterans and their families. To explain how RSL Victoria works in the space, RSL Victoria's Mental Health Advisor, Carolyn Deans, discusses the model for wellbeing and how it applies to an RSL context.

CAROLYN DEANS

RSL Victoria prides itself on delivering mental health and wellbeing services, but what does wellbeing encompass and how does the RSL play its part in helping veterans achieve it? According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), "positive wellbeing is associated with being comfortable, happy or healthy". The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) echoes this: "Our approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families recognises that good mental health is supported by whole of life being."

Carolyn Deans is RSL Victoria's Mental Health Advisor and brings a wealth of experience to the position. Carolyn is a Clinical Psychologist and has served for about 25 years, both full and part-time, in the Australian Army Psychology Corps. She is now an Active Reservist.

Of wellbeing Carolyn says: "Essentially, wellbeing can be defined as experiencing positive emotional states, feeling connected to and valued by others, and having a sense of meaning and purpose in life."

"Wellbeing is not just the absence of ill health, but it is the ability of people to realise their potential and live their best life."

It is important to recognise that because there are multiple factors that contribute to wellbeing, RSL Victoria works with government, health and service providers, employers and other ESOs with the aim of providing the best possible overall outcomes for veterans.

"We use the AIHW model of determinants of health and wellbeing. So, what we are really interested in is what are the things that actually enable people to live that best life," says Carolyn.

The model she talks about suggests that there are seven factors of wellbeing: justice and safety, housing, education and skills, employment, income and finance, health, and social support. For veterans and their families, RSL Victoria also considers recognition and respect to be important elements of wellbeing.

As Carolyn explains, to experience wellbeing all of these factors need to come together in one way or another.

"So, for a person to feel like they are in a state of wellbeing, and to be experiencing wellbeing outcomes that you can measure, all different elements need to come together."

Wellbeing is a critical area for RSL Victoria and one which the organisation is constantly reviewing.

Carolyn says RSL Victoria has several strengths in its wellbeing space.

"RSL Vic. is part of the oldest peer support network for veterans in Australia. We've been doing peer support for 100 or so years now, it's what we were founded to do and there's a lot of evidence at the moment that social support is an enabler to wellbeing. It's very important."

"To be set up in a way that enables the continual delivery of peer support

is something that the RSL is quite unique in, and something that we need to work to continue to evolve upon because we want our social support network to be inclusive, and to understand wellbeing and how to encourage people to engage in help-seeking."

The provision of much of RSL Victoria and our aligned Sub-Branches' peer support programs, like RSL Active, Day Clubs and home and hospital visitation, is thanks to an effective volunteer network, which is integral in fulfilling RSL Victoria's mission and ethos.

She says "care navigation" is another area RSL Victoria does well in.

"People come to the RSL, to our Advocates, to our VETCEN people because sometimes negotiating DVA and all of the other services is confusing."

Care navigation is a function of the RSL Victoria's veteran support services that has been formalised through the creation of VETCEN.

Carolyn says there is ongoing work to fill the gaps where RSL Victoria may be able to expand its services, better its existing services and collaborate with other organisations; for example, the areas of homelessness and housing.

Given that wellbeing is largely subjective, it's tricky to measure. Nevertheless, RSL Victoria aims to enable veterans to work towards their own goals.

"Am I comfortable, am I healthy, am I happy? You need to allow a person to define their own sense of wellbeing... you're not going to tell them where they should be in their life."

Part of Carolyn's ongoing work behind the scenes is also ensuring the wellbeing of the staff and volunteers who work in veteran services, which can sometimes be a challenging job.

"How do we equip them with the correct skills and abilities to help veterans, but also how do we take care of our staff mentally? Are they enjoying their work and have the resilience processes in place themselves to manage working with veterans who can sometimes be in significant distress?"

Carolyn says while there are guidelines to help define wellbeing, at the end of the day, it's a personal journey.

"In my mind, that's another thing the RSL has done really well for years and years and that is what we are focused on; each individual veteran as a person."



Wellbeing is not just the absence of ill health, but it is the ability of people to realise their potential and live their best life.

CAROLYN DEANS
MENTAL HEALTH ADVISOR OF RSL VICTORIA

VETERAN WELLBEING DOMAINS



RSL ADVOCACY

Advocacy is the act of making representations on behalf of another to ensure that they receive a fair hearing of their case or an outcome they seek.

In the context of RSL Victoria, this means providing support to veterans and current serving ADF personnel who are seeking entitlements, based on their service, from the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA). RSL Victoria Advocates play a vital role in support of veterans throughout Victoria. The compensation support provided by these Advocates is provided, free of charge, to all members of the serving and ex-service community in Victoria. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, RSL Victoria's Advocates continued to provide a high standard of advocacy services to veterans and their families.

Being an RSL advocate is a challenging and rewarding role. RSL Victoria Advocates are not only experts in navigating the DVA claims process, but they also excel at supporting veterans to access both welfare and wellbeing supports.



ADAM KENT
Military Compensation
Advocate of RSL Victoria

HOW WE HELP

Veterans are often faced with challenges assimilating back into everyday civilian life; from the basics of accessing medical care through to navigating claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA).

But it's people like RSL Victoria's Military Compensation Advocate, Adam Kent who are committed to supporting veterans access the support they need.

Adam is part of the RSL's statewide network of Advocates. Adam served full-time in the Army for five years and has remained a reservist. He went on to work in the mining industry for 10 years, but life after service wasn't all easy. After two marriage breakdowns, Adam moved to Warrnambool. "I didn't really know anyone and had some issues..."

He became involved with the local RSL through RSL Active – a program he is now passionate about, after being on the receiving end of its many benefits. "With the journey that I had and a good understanding through my lived experience and how the RSL Active program really gave me that camaraderie again, I was then motivated to work with veterans."

His own service history means Adam is relatable and can establish a rapport based on trust and understanding. He has story after story of the various clients he has supported over the last couple of years.

He regards his advocacy work as the link veterans may need to navigate their way, whether they have just transitioned out, or have been out for decades.

"Often, I'll refer clients that are having mental health issues to Open Arms. I've sat with them at times to have an assessment over the phone and we also link them up to DVA services, like Home Help and rehab managers and medical providers too."

"One bloke came to me in a really cloudy headspace. I could tell he would really benefit from getting involved, but it's about being encouraging and not forceful – as soon as a veteran feels pressured they'll run the other way. After a couple of months, he dipped his toes in and really embraced it and then that helped him turn his life around."

Adam notes the 'domino effect' of veterans reaching out for support. The client has successfully applied for a volunteer position with the Country Fire Authority – a significant achievement in his life.

"Another guy I met served for like 30 years or something and went to a medical appointment and they asked him about a Medicare card and he didn't have one. They were talking to him like 'What sort of weirdo in their 60s doesn't have a Medicare card?' He felt humiliated.

"A guy came in for advocacy work and I got a claim up for him, which meant he could get incapacity payments. He was over the moon because that gave him a small, steady income,

which was a bit more than Centrelink. He's now engaged with RSL Active and has become a better version of himself and he's really excelling. He now realises he has skills, and he can make a positive contribution to his community.

"I had another who came to me, he was medically discharged due to a knee injury and was really isolating himself and wanted a reassessment of his injury. When we got talking, I realised there were a lot more claims he was entitled to that he didn't even realise he could get, including for mental health. He received a TPI pension, which is the highest you can get"

Adam has not only witnessed some life-changing outcomes as a result of the RSL's advocacy service, but also seen many of those on the receiving end pay-it-forward by becoming mentors to others.

He says one of the most rewarding aspects of his job are some of the most challenging cases.

"When you've got terminal [service accepted cancer, for example] clients and they come for an assessment because they're worried about when they're gone that their spouse will be looked after financially."

Adam says there are so many veterans that don't know what they're entitled to and attempt to take on the paperwork and systems themselves.

"It's just important to go through an Advocate, it would be a lot smoother and take the stress away."

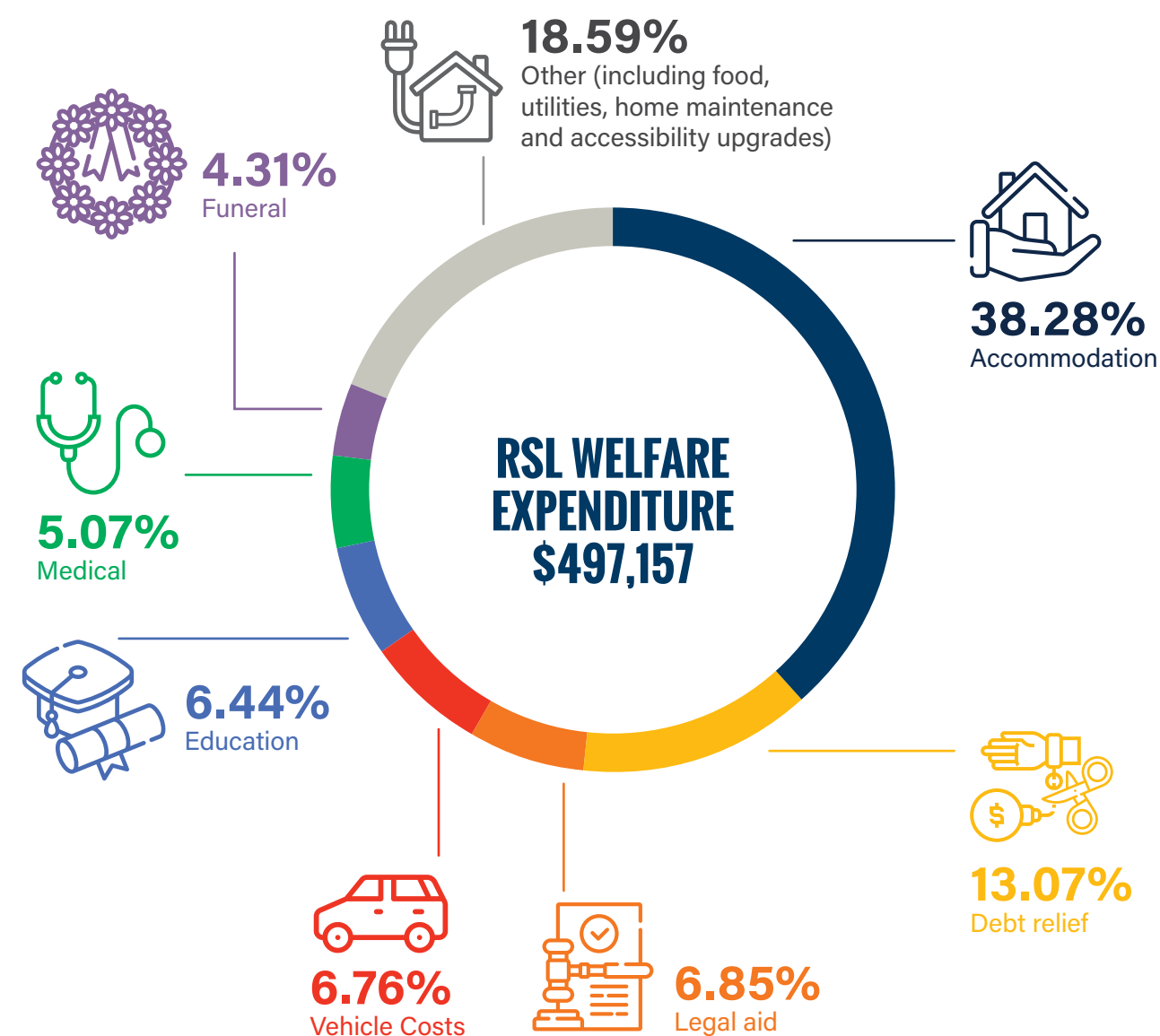
Advocates are a critical link in supporting veterans and their families, and allows veterans to focus on their lives and live the best version of it.

RSL WELFARE EXPENDITURE

RSL Victoria provides welfare payments to veterans and their families, alongside wellbeing programs and advocacy support. With these three programs working together, RSL Victoria helps veterans and their families to live their best lives.

In 2020 RSL Victoria spent \$497,157 on providing direct financial assistance to veterans and their families.

RSL Victoria's welfare expenditure can be categorised by:





HOW RSL WELFARE CAN HELP

Asking for help isn't easy, but in many cases the alternative is unbearable.

"The bank was going to foreclose on the mortgage and we were going to be living on the streets."

Steven* is a husband, a father to three and a veteran. An injury during his service ultimately left him incapacitated and unable to work. At one stage after his discharge, his pension was \$64 a fortnight.

"Try to feed a family of five on that, as you can imagine, it's pretty tight."

Scrimping and saving became the norm. "I couldn't even walk to the garage and get a \$2 coffee. I felt guilty spending even a dollar because that could've bought a couple of sausages."

"Some days I was going three days without food for the reason being that my concern was to feed the kids. If there happened to be any leftovers, I'd eat that."

At one stage, Steven was switching off the electricity at home to save every possible dollar.

Only wanting the best for his family and with the pressure and stress mounting to look after them, Steven attempted suicide.

"My logic was that my family would be better off if I died, that they would get assistance from Legacy and all that."

Following advice from his Military Compensation Advocate, Steven sought financial assistance from RSL Victoria.

"For me, asking for financial help was embarrassing as hell...but I did it, and we got help initially for six months worth of bills, including the mortgage and food vouchers, because my Advocate knew it was going to take that long for DVA to increase my pension.

"Then I had to go back and ask for more because DVA hadn't come through yet, and I was offered another three months."

As Steven knows, RSL Victoria's welfare assistance can take a variety of forms, such as monetary payments, subsidies and vouchers or housing assistance.

Steven is still healing, but he barely recognises the man he was.

The point is, I know the kids have food on the table, there's a roof over their head and when it's cold, the heaters work.

"I was in a hole I couldn't get out of, now I see light at the end of the tunnel — it's not a big light, but it's there."

He says it's with huge thanks to his Advocate and RSL Victoria's welfare payments that he's got a second chance at life.

"If you need assistance, don't be embarrassed. Put your hand up and say, 'I can do this.' The RSL can and will help you."

*Steven is not his real name.

TRANSITIONAL ACCOMMODATION

Homelessness and housing instability are ongoing issues that disproportionately affect the ex-service community. In 2020 RSL Victoria spent \$190,320 on providing direct financial assistance to veterans seeking support for costs associated with accommodation. In 2020 RSL Victoria provided assistance to 30 veterans experiencing homelessness.

Since 2015, RSL Victoria has run the Richmond Accommodation project in partnership with the Victorian Government and Housing Choices Australia. The project provides short and medium term accommodation for veterans with significant physical and mental health issues who are at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. In 2020, 11 veterans were accommodated as part of the Richmond Accommodation Project.

VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES WELLBEING CENTRES

In 2020 the Veteran Services Directorate began a review of veteran support offered throughout the regions. An important outcome of this review process is the intention to build upon the great work and long-standing partnership between RSL Victoria and the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia that established the regional Veteran Centre Project, to create Veteran and their Families Wellbeing Centres. The updated centre models will increase professional support services offered to veterans and their families regions, with purpose-built spaces and

professional staff that will work alongside volunteers to deliver greater support to veterans. To oversee that creation and ongoing running of the Veteran and their Families Wellbeing Centres, RSL Victoria has recruited two new staff members, with more staff to come in 2021. Work is already underway to establish Veteran and their Families Wellbeing Centres in Melbourne, Warrnambool, Geelong, Frankston and Wodonga. The Wodonga centre is being created in partnership with the Australian Federal Government who has provided funding in support of the project.

The Wodonga Veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre

In December of 2020 RSL Victoria received \$5 million in funding from the Australian Federal Government to establish the Wodonga Veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre. Once established the Wodonga Veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre will bring trauma-informed, contemporary and progressive veteran and families support services to Victoria's far north-east. The new Wodonga Veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre will build on the strong foundation of veteran support provided through the Hume Veteran Information Centre(HVIC).

The Wodonga Veterans and their Families Wellbeing Centre is due to open in the second half of 2021.



- 1 **Altona**
Bay West Veterans Centre
- 2 **Bendigo**
Central Victorian Veterans' Support Centre
- 3 **Drouin**
West Gippsland Veterans Welfare Centre
- 4 **Echuca**
Echuca-Moama Veterans' Support Centre
- 5 **Frankston**
Frankston Veterans Centre
- 6 **Geelong**
Geelong & Surf Coast Regional Veterans Centre
- 7 **Sale**
Gippsland Veterans Welfare Centre
- 8 **Heidelberg**
Heidelberg Repatriation Veterans Centre

- 9 **Horsham**
Wimmera Veterans Centre
- 10 **Moe**
Moe & District Veterans & Service Support Centre
- 11 **Victoria Barracks (Southbank)**
Melbourne Veterans & Services Centre, Victoria Barracks
- 12 **Melton**
Western Suburbs Veterans Services Centre
- 13 **Shepparton**
Goulburn Valley Veterans Centre
- 14 **Swan Hill**
Swan Hill & District Veterans Information Centre
- 15 **Warrnambool**
Veterans Hub
- 16 **Wodonga**
Hume Veterans Information Centre

RSL Active is a program from RSL Victoria. The program provides a range of events and activities for the younger veteran community.

Due to the pandemic, RSL Active was unable to host physical events for much of 2020. However, the program successfully pivoted to running online activities, keeping veterans connected throughout the pandemic.

More than 700 veterans participated in online RSL Active events in 2020.

Activity	Number of participants
Yoga class	423
Art therapy	82
Personal training sessions	233
Guitar lessons	19
Cooking lessons	14
Zumba classes	15
Grand Total	786

RSL Active's online events were supported by the Victorian Government through a \$10,000 grant through ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund. In total, RSL Active hosted 200 events in 2020.

RSL Active promotes health and wellbeing to Victorian veterans and their families. Importantly the RSL Active program provides a way for veterans to connect with other veterans and develop social networks, share ideas, tell stories, enhance support circles, and improve physical and mental health. RSL Active is open to all veterans and their immediate families.

MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH RSL ACTIVE

Stuart Chandler

As Stuart Chandler waited to board a helicopter joy flight at Moorabbin Airport courtesy of RSL Active, it's clear he had a new lease on life.

RSL Active is known for many things – a way to connect with other veterans, develop social networks, tell stories, enhance support circles and improve physical and mental health. Some, like Stuart and his family, even call it life-changing.

It is because of this that Stuart and his wife Jenean are such advocates of the program.

“When I was struggling, honestly, what RSL Active did was keep the household together.

“Obviously, I was going through a lot and my wife was trying to deal with it and my kids were dealing with it and RSL Active allowed not just me, but everyone could drop their guard and relax. And if something was going to happen, they knew there were other veterans and RSL Active to help deal with it.”

His wife of 26 years, Jenean, agrees.

“It's an outing where it takes pressure off you, off worrying about what they're going to do. He's a lot better.”

Stuart immigrated to Australia with his family when he was a toddler, but it was a defining moment in his life.

“When I grew up, I decided I wanted to give back to the country that accepted me...to say thank you to the country that gave me basically a new start.”

In 1982, when he was half way through year 11, Stuart enlisted with the Royal Australian Navy, aged 17.



Because I suffer from severe anxiety, I don't go out a lot but RSL Active makes it enjoyable because being all ex-service people, we all understand where each other are coming from.

STUART CHANDLER

“When I got there and started the training it was scary to be honest because what they do is, they break you so they can remould you.”

Part of his training took place at *HMAS Albatross*, where Stuart mastered the art of packing life jackets, parachutes, life rafts and various safety equipment for aircraft.

“One day, we had an officer walk in... he goes ‘Do you reckon you packed those good enough for your own life?’ We just laughed and he said ‘Come with me!’ So, we went up in a Caribou, jumped out at 3000 feet with our chutes on to make sure they worked.”

It sure was a lesson in putting your heart and soul into packing every parachute correctly.

With his rigorous training complete, Stuart was given the opportunity to go to sea and was posted to *HMAS Torrens*, where shift work was the norm and living conditions a squeeze.

“You're literally living, breathing, showering, working together...so you get really close.”

And so began Stuart's journey of camaraderie.

“The mateship was not just at sea but when we had weekend leave, say in Singapore, we'd go to the pub together and have a few beers, do stuff as a group. So even when we got the opportunity to be apart, we were never”

Stuart was qualified to work in vertical transport.

“I used to work a lot under helicopters, as in, they were flying at say 8 feet above me and I would be under them, manoeuvring helicopters into position, picking up luggage and picking up people.”

He enjoyed the pace, the adrenalin, and the unusual opportunities.

“I used to get a lot of joy flights in the helicopters and because we had the Sky Hawk aircraft, I got rides in the dual seat jet and that was magnificent because we were doing three or four gs. The speed was unreal.”

Some of Stuart's more challenging moments included some of his deployments, like to Papua New Guinea.



"For the first 24–48 hours we got there and we were the ones that had to walk around the streets with rifles at night until the Army got in and we got back on our ship.

"We don't know what's around every corner, so your first reaction would be to pull the trigger and ask questions later, but clearly at the back on your mind you don't want to do that. So, it's a big mess confusion-wise."

Stuart knows it wreaked havoc with his mental health, but at the time, it was common to sit down, have a beer with your service mates and laugh it off.

It was also during his time on *Torrens*, Stuart suffered an injury to his wrist. But with short-term, quick fixes to get him back on the job, the injury continued to plague him.

During his service, he transferred from *HMAS Torrens* to *HMAS Jervis Bay*, and spent four years at sea.

Unfortunately, Stuart reinjured his wrist, which ultimately led to him being medically discharged in 1988, with the rank of Able Seaman.

Life after service saw Stuart move from job to job, which included driving a truck – a job that helped him recover from his alcohol addiction. But after multiple operations on his arm, doctors advised he could no longer work.

Stuart spiralled and his mental health struggled. In his words, he hit rock bottom. He attempted suicide multiple times and spent months in a psychiatric ward.

Jenean says life with Stuart was really hard at times. "It was like living with the Incredible Hulk." He'd be alright and then all of a sudden he would explode."

She remembers Stuart being so conditioned from his service that beds were constantly remade at home and towels had to be rolled.

Just two years ago, Stuart attended his first RSL Active event.

"Because I suffer from severe anxiety, I don't go out a lot but RSL Active makes it enjoyable because being all ex-service people, we all understand where each other are coming from."

Even when Stuart can't participate in certain activities, he says he attends to be sociable — something that wouldn't have ever crossed his mind before. Jenean says he's a changed man.

"I think the first two or three times he just didn't speak to anybody but now, it's a lot better, he goes off and talks to the other guys."

During Victoria's extended COVID-19 lockdowns last year, RSL Active embraced technology and ran as many activities online as possible. Stuart's daughters participated in online yoga, even if they didn't take it too seriously.

"They sat their laughing their heads off, but even that was helpful!"

Stuart, Jenean and their three children are a team to be reckoned with, being by each other's side each step of the way — when times were incredibly tough and through the ongoing journey of healing and recovery.

The family are eternally grateful to the RSL for its support along the way.

Michael Apap

RAAF veteran Michael Apap lifts his bow and arrow to take aim at the target ahead, and in between shots, he mingles with others, while his son Lachlan and stepdaughter Harriette are in sight, also socialising and learning a new skill.

They are regulars at RSL Active events following Michael's challenging medical discharge after almost 20 years of service. RSL Active provides a range of activities and events for

the younger veteran community to connect with each other and improve physical and mental health.

"RSL Active has been an introduction back into the real world, back into socialising and it's really nice because of the incorporation with family as well," says Michael.

Michael craved a fulfilling career, which he didn't get from his various jobs after finishing school. The RAAF piqued his interest and after chatting with a relative in the Air Force, who jokingly told him not to join the Army, Michael enlisted in 1998.

"It was just something I thought I'd be able to really kind of get that sort of job satisfaction and it didn't fail."

With an all-round rewarding career in the RAAF, Michael's pinnacle was his three-month deployment to Iraq.

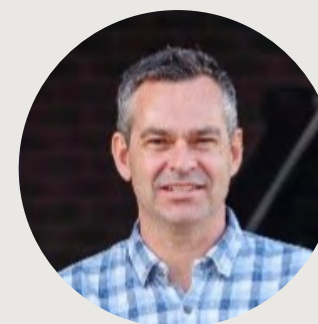
"You basically did 12 on, 12 off. It wasn't like you had a recreational place to go chill on weekends. It was just your work. You worked flat out and we were working with the US Air Force and we were doing all their aircraft. I don't even know the amount of cargo we loaded and unloaded. It was just monumental."

His homecoming was an emotional one.

"I remember how happy I was to come home. I think I had a tear in my eye when I was on the plane and I knew we were coming into Western Australia and just sort of go, 'Thank God!'"

As his final few years with the RAAF came around, Michael's mental health started to suffer, and a series of "quick fixes" to get him back on the job were not long-term solutions. The next challenge came when he was medically discharged.

"I wouldn't call it an easy transition, probably a loss of identity and I wasn't very well either and didn't know how I could fit in and how it would work."



I feel blessed in a way to be given the opportunity to be able to focus on myself, without having a time frame to heal, to heal from my discharge, as in that grief associated with not really being ready to go, but I think it happened for a reason.

MICHAEL APAP

Over the last three years, Michael has spent time investing in his mental health and wellbeing.

"I feel blessed in a way to be given the opportunity to be able to focus on myself, without having a time frame to heal, to heal from my discharge, as in that grief associated with not really being ready to go, but I think it happened for a reason."

A big part of Michael's transition has been his involvement with RSL Active — to socialise with people he has an often unspoken but shared bond.

"It's stress free, and you know, nobody is talking shop...we all just know that everyone here has served in some way or another."

By all accounts, the Michael at discharge is a shadow of the man he is now.

"It came to a point where I felt like I'd nearly lost everything, to having everything I need — my family, my health."



Michael Apap

“Camaraderie”

“Interaction and keeping motivation and routines”

“They are fun and good for general wellbeing”

“Easy break the boredom engaging fun social connection. luv it”

“Can work at own pace without feeling self-conscious”

“Free, interesting, varied. get to try something I wouldn't usually try.”

“I live in regional Victoria which means I can do all classes from home and don't need to travel. The convenience of online classes means it is very easy for me to participate”

“The meditation and learning yoga”

“It has been wonderful for my mental wellbeing during weeks and weeks of lockdown. Very welcoming group.”

“Interaction and keeping motivation and routines”

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LIKED ABOUT RSL ACTIVE ONLINE

“Well structured and inclusive”

“It's a way to connect during these times also it provides a common ground for connection. It's absolutely amazing. Thank you!”

“It caters for a large range of activities to cater for the variety of personalities of veterans”

“Easy to be at home and still be active even through a pandemic”

“Feeling connected with the group”

“They are fun and its good to see other people doing it too.”

“The fact I could do it in my safe environment without being exposed to people or having to leave my home. It was also great as at times unfortunately my PTSD wasn't so good and I needed to be alone so I didn't have the pressure of having to feel as though I had to attend or leave the house. All the activities were friendly with no judgment of ability. Each time I was secretly extremely nervous but felt safe as it would've been impossible to do if I had to be around people physically. It felt as socialising without being put in a situation where people could get personal or ask you questions. My favourite was the trek because it helped me to leave my home knowing I was Exercising with other veterans. I felt the benefits mentally and physically, until sadly I had injured my knee and required surgery.”

“If I had training before hand with friends I would have enjoyed the experience online much better.”

“I would like to say thanks! It has been great to get to know vets from all over the state. And when we open up again we have already agreed that we will catch up in person. Outstanding result given the circumstances, well done.”

“They are self paced, you don't have to turn on your camera, they are very interactive and the people are very nice.”

“It keeps me busy and interacting with other humans.”

“The geographic flexibility. Before these I had not lived near any of the session locations. It is also nice not to have to travel and to have so many friendly faces on screen.”

“Helps with the stress at these times and contact with other members”

“Staying connected with the veteran community right across the state.”

“Great initiative, keep it going”

“Easy to follow and excellent presenters”

“The ease of it. A lot of the time if I need to go to something I get nervous and don't go. Online fixes that somehow”

“The ability to keep both mind and body active at least a few times a week during lock-down”

“They give me something that is just for me. I have loved the guitar lessons”

“Relaxed and friendly atmosphere”

“Friendly, professional, well-organised, punctual, great fun. I really miss the session if I cannot attend. No equipment / special gear needed”

“Catching up, banter”

“Its great to have something to look forward to”

“Appreciate the effort and thoughts for the community. A big thank you to the organisers”

“Fantastic program that should be implemented in all sub-branches”

“Great initiative and so good for our vets.”

“Active Online Activities are the best thing that I have found in a long time. Thank you to those that take the time to organise these activities and also those that take the time to conduct the activities.”

“Been a blessing through the lockdown”

“I'm deeply grateful for them. Please keep doing awesomeness.”

FUNDRAISING

ANZAC AND POPPY APPEALS

Victorians make a huge impact online

One of the most significant functions that RSL Victoria performs is to coordinate and support the Sub-Branch network to fundraise for the annual ANZAC and Poppy Appeals.

The importance of this fundraising effort cannot be understated as the funds raised by both the ANZAC and Poppy Appeals are used to underpin much of the RSL Victoria's veteran support offering, including advocacy services, wellbeing programs and welfare grants.

The traditional model for an appeal is a great collaboration between the fundraising team at RSL Victoria and the dedicated volunteers in the Sub-branch network, who selflessly give their time to sell ANZAC badges and poppies each year.

The 2020 ANZAC and Poppy Appeals will certainly be remembered for being an extraordinary period in the history of RSL Victoria, with the pandemic severely impacting physical fundraising through the sale of ANZAC badges and limiting traditional fundraising capability in support of the Poppy Appeal; thus presenting a significant challenge for everyone involved in RSL Victoria fundraising.

With traditional fundraising strategies not available or limited, a greater emphasis was placed on a digital fundraising strategy.

Strategies included:

- Facebook, Google and YouTube advertising
- digital lead generation
- digital re-marketing
- email direct marketing.

Through these strategies, Victorians raised \$365,524 for the ANZAC Appeal by donating online. This compared to \$17,767 raised through online donations in 2019.

In the lead-up to Remembrance Day 2020, RSL Victoria undertook a redevelopment of the Poppy Appeal website with the intent of modernising the site and making the platform more engaging for digital donations and highly shareable for social media. In addition to improving the donation platform, the redeveloped website also enabled donors to share personal stories and their motivation for donating via the newly created digital poppy garden.

In addition to improving the donation platform, the redeveloped website also enabled donors to share personal stories and their motivation for donating via the newly created digital poppy garden.



Donate online to this year's ANZAC Appeal

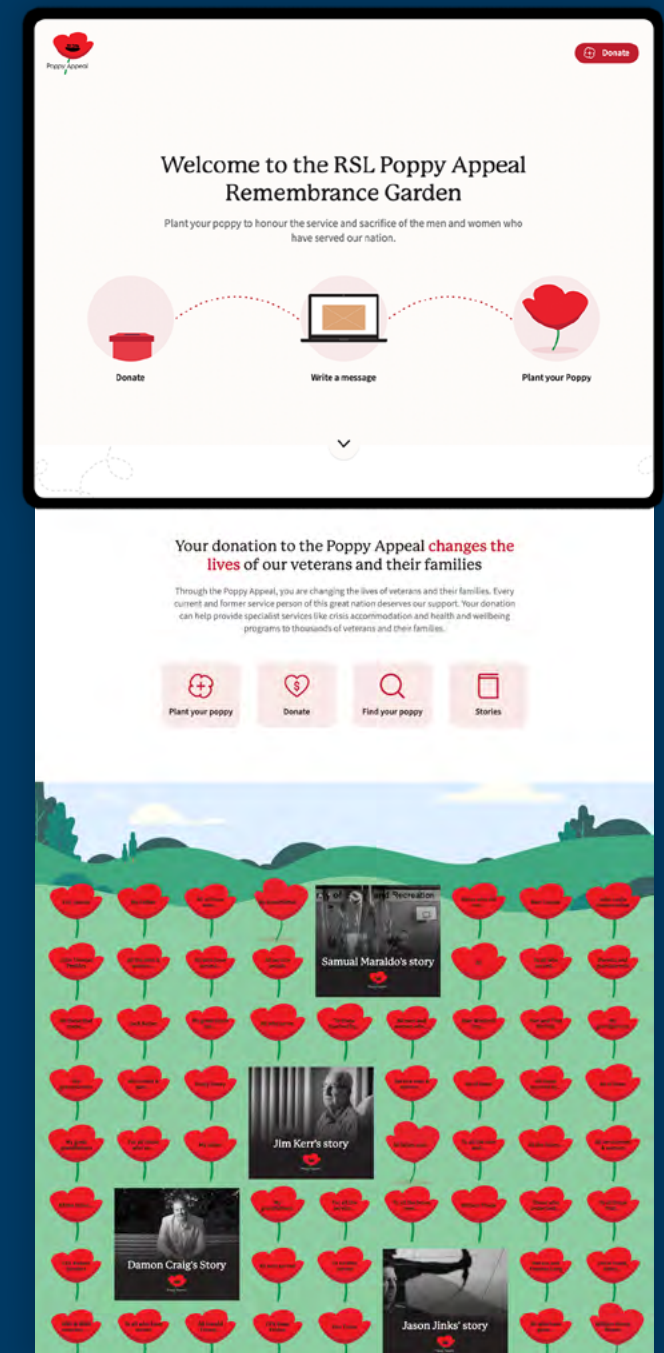
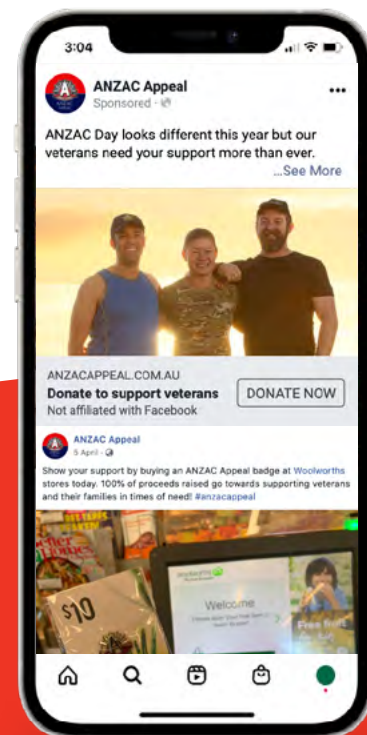
Dear [First Name],

These are extraordinary times. The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is like nothing we've known since World War II.

This time, we are at war with an invisible virus. And each of us has been forced to make huge personal sacrifices to save the lives of our fellow Australians.

[First Name] this health crisis is also placing RSL Victoria's veteran support programs under unprecedented pressure.

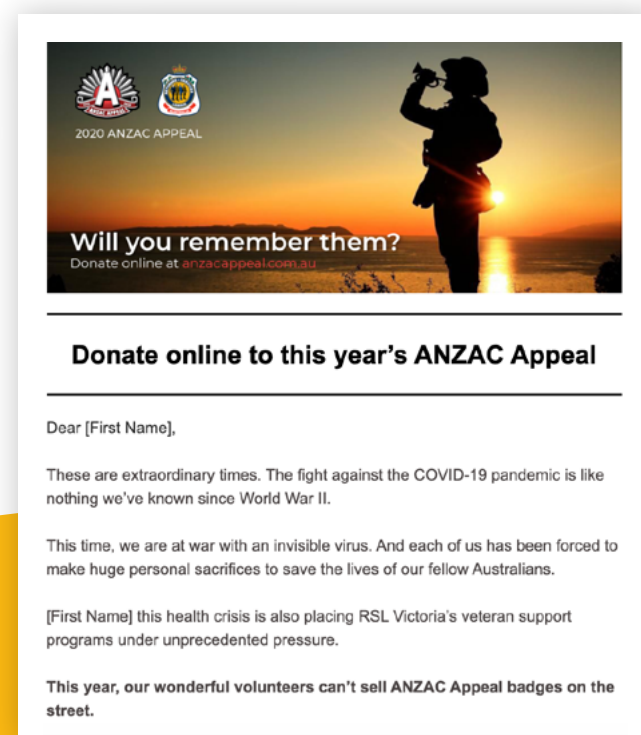
This year, our wonderful volunteers can't sell ANZAC Appeal badges on the street.



In combination with RSL Victoria's strong digital strategies, the redeveloped website helped raise \$111,359 in digital donations for the 2020 Poppy Appeal, compared to \$6,110 raised through digital donations in 2019.

Although out of necessity, both the 2020 ANZAC and Poppy Appeals focused on digital donations, and RSL Victoria remained mindful of those members and previous donors who would not be able to participate digitally. In response, RSL Victoria launched our first direct mail fundraising activity. The direct mail activity was met with an overwhelmingly positive response and raised \$229,990 for the ANZAC Appeal and \$237,473 for the Poppy Appeal.

RSL Victoria also ensured that despite the pandemic, our donors who wanted to buy a badge would have an opportunity to do so at Officeworks and Woolworths stores across Australia. Having the ANZAC and Poppy Appeal point of sale boxes in Officeworks and Woolworths stores across Australia is an important partnership that RSL Victoria manages on behalf of all State Branches of the RSL, and funds raised within the different states stay within the states. In Victoria sale of badges at Officeworks and Woolworths stores raised \$223,416 for the two Appeals in 2020.



In total, RSL Victoria raised \$1,126,638.33 for the ANZAC Appeal and \$1,444,394.50 for the Poppy Appeal.

GIFTS IN WILLS

The funding base for RSL Victoria to deliver support and service to veterans and their families has, in the main, come from the annual ANZAC and Poppy Appeals, undertaken so magnificently by our wonderful volunteers and supported so generously by the Victorian public.

While the continued growth and success of our two annual Appeals remains an important pillar of RSL Victoria, our strategy includes the development and implementation of new and enhanced fundraising strategies and methods.

Consistent with the strategic direction, 2020 saw the introduction of RSL Victoria's Gifts in Wills program. The Gifts in Will program provides an opportunity for supporters to make a lasting impact on the lives of veterans now and for future generations. The program has been initiated through a structured series of surveys to our membership audience to enable us to gain a deeper understanding of members' connections to service, their motivations to support veterans and their families and to the ways they may wish to give in the future.

The responses to the surveys have been most heartening and revealed a very strong sentiment of the respondents feeling "forever grateful" for the service and sacrifice of our serving and ex-service men and women and a desire that our "veteran family can lead their best lives". This sentiment underpins the generosity of our supporters who, when they understand how valuable and important their gift is to the betterment of veterans' lives, make their empowering decision to leave a gift in their will.

A will is one of the most important documents a person will ever sign. It is the best way to ensure your possessions and assets go to the people and causes you care about most. It ensures that your generosity will live on. Alarming, more than half of all Australians do not have a will.

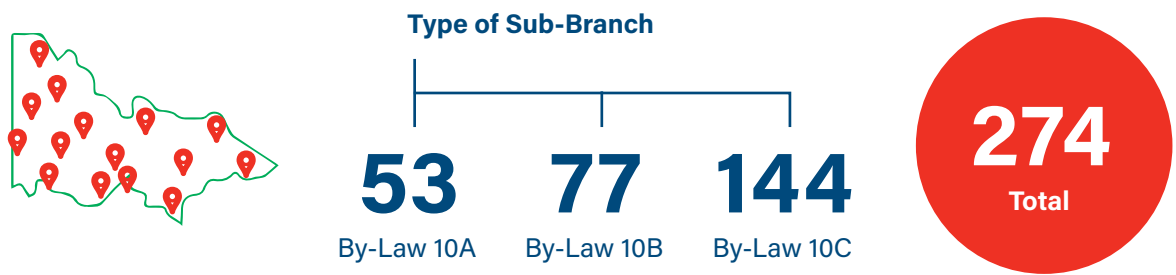
RSL Victoria understands and supports the importance of taking care of family and friends first in one's will and gratefully acknowledges the inclusion of a gift to the RSL so that we can assist our veteran family to prosper in all life circumstances.

Our Gifts in Wills program respects the privacy of our supporters, provides guidance and offers the opportunity, through our Forever Grateful Family, to hear of the work we do in support of veterans.



OUR IMPACT

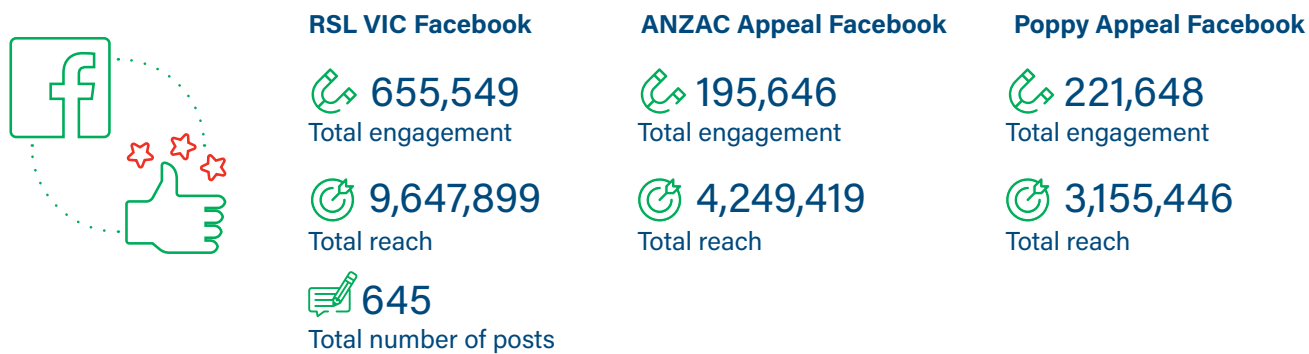
RSL SUB-BRANCHES



MEMBERSHIP OF THE RSL IN VICTORIA



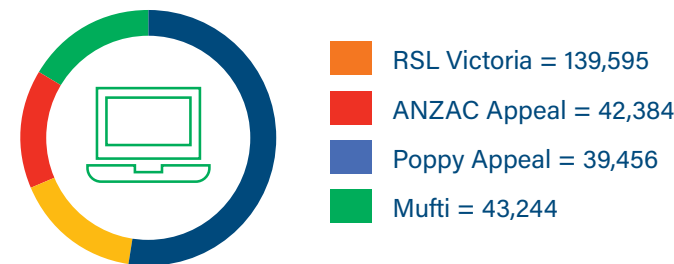
SOCIAL MEDIA



COMMEMORATION



WEBSITE VISITS



APPEALS



Total amount raised ANZAC Appeal 2020:
\$1,126,638.33



Total amount raised Poppy Appeal 2020:
\$1,444,394.50

WELFARE DATA



Spend by categories

Accommodation	38.28%
Debt relief	13.07%
Legal aid	6.85%
Vehicle costs	6.76%
Education	6.44%
Medical	5.07%
Funeral	4.31%
Other (including food, utilities, home maintenance and accessibility upgrades)	18.59%

Ages of veterans accessing support

18-29	12%
30-39	15%
40-49	40%
50-59	10%
60-69	7%
70-79	11%
80+	2%
Age not given	4%

Spend by region

Metro	34%
Regional	56%
Interstate	6%
Location not given	4%

Spend by gender

Male	84%
Female	14%
Gender not given	2%

Service arm

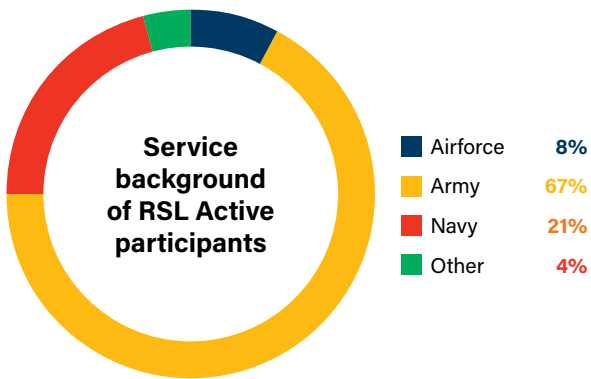
Army	66%
Navy	20%
Airforce	8%
Other (including families and dependants)	6%



RSL ACTIVE

RSL Active	
Activity	Number of participants
Yoga class	423
Art therapy	82
Personal training sessions	233
Guitar lessons	19
Cooking lessons	14
Zumba classes	15
GRAND TOTAL	786

Service background of RSL Active participants

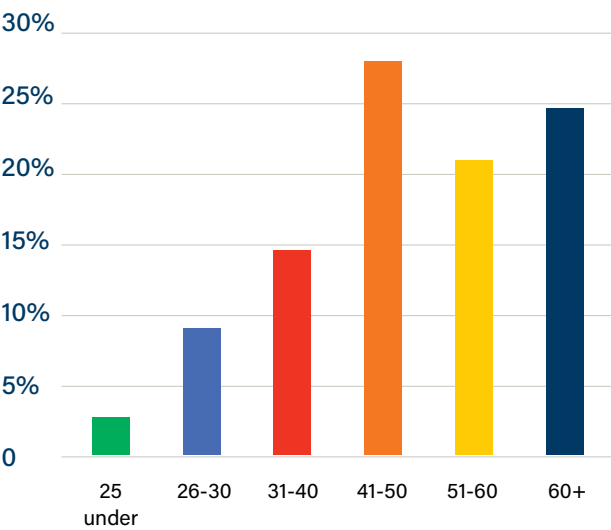


67 per cent of participants had served in the Army, 21 per cent Navy and 8 per cent Airforce.
*Other indicates veterans who have not specified service background

In 2020 67 per cent of participants in RSL Active events had not attended an RSL Active event before



The largest age group representation was 41-50 years with 28 per cent of participants. 45 per cent were over 50 years of age, of which 25 per cent were over 60.



VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT DATA
(RECORDED IN BETTER IMPACT)

 **138,101**
Total volunteer hours recorded in Better Impact

Report Group	Hours
Administration and Management	60962
Appeals	5887
Community Support	11279
Heritage and Commemorations	6420
Veteran Support - Compensation Advocacy	24722
Veteran Support - DVA Day Clubs	1965
Veteran Support - Wellbeing Support	2780
Womens Auxiliary	24086

- Total number of Volunteers registered on Better impact at the end of 2020 was 6974, representing a 22 per cent increase the number registered in 2019
- Total number of volunteer hours recorded in Better Impact in 2020 was 138,101 representing a decrease on the volunteers hours recorded in 2019 by 56.50 per cent. This impact can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic and related lockdowns in Victoria.
- In 2020 RSL Volunteers assisted 14,658 veterans or families of veterans in 2020; this representing a 32.81 per cent decrease in the number of veterans and their families assisted in 2019.
- RSL volunteers made 2,207 home and hospital visits to veterans in 2020. This representing 78.47 per cent decrees in the number of home and hospital visits made in 2019, and directly reflects the impact of COVID-19 related restrictions and lockdowns on volunteers activities.
- RSL Volunteers travelled 136,172 km in 2020. This is a 67.21 per cent decrease in the number of kilometres travelled in 2019.

10 SUB-BRANCH
NETWORK PERFORMANCE

2020 Total Revenue (Incorporated Entity)
\$133,399,207
which was down on 2019 by \$181,707,598 or 58 per cent

2020 Total Rent Paid (Incorporated Entity)
\$7,535,043
which was down on 2019 by \$11,177,139 or 60 per cent

2020 Welfare & Charitable (Incorporated Entity)
\$4,558,792
Total W&C, which was down on 2019 by \$6,775,590 or 60 per cent.
Of the total W&C of \$4,558,792, \$2,394,644 was directed towards veterans and \$2,164,148 was directed towards charitable community benefit.

2020 Net Loss (Incorporated Entity)
\$3,291,969
Total loss, which was down on 2019 by \$14,294,865

2020 Patriotic Fund Veteran Welfare
\$715,446
Total Patriotic Fund expenditure towards veterans, which was 16 per cent down on 2019 despite 60 per cent less rent income into the Patriotic Fund.

2020 Volunteer Hours
118,983 hours
Total volunteer hours equivalent to \$4,831,909, which was 65 per cent down on 2019

2020 Appeals Income
\$529,650
Total appeals income which was 76 per cent down on 2019

2020 Appeals Expenditure
\$830,629
Total appeals expenditure, which was 42 per cent down on 2019

COMMUNICATIONS

RSL Victoria is responsible for publicly and internally communicating achievements and objects of the State Branch.

It is also responsible for managing strategic and crisis communications on behalf on the League, and our Sub-Branches. RSL Victoria also plays a big role in supporting commemoration throughout Victoria and deploys significant rescues in the communication and marking of major commemorative dates.



RSL Victoria communicates through multiple channels including:

- social and traditional media
- Electronic Direct Mail (eDMs)
- print publications.

The year 2020 was an extraordinary one for RSL Victoria and communications played a large role in keeping our community — staff, members and veterans — connected throughout the pandemic. Communications also played a large role in ensuring Victoria's continued commitment to commemoration, and in supporting vital governance outcomes for RSL Victoria — especially the Annual State Conference.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Engaging members and the public through digital storytelling has always been a priority for RSL Victoria, one that became even more important during 2020. It was through social media that RSL Victoria was able to maintain a connection to much of our community, fire imaginations and build understanding.

In 2020 RSL Victoria focused on creating meaningful social media content that supported commemoration, veterans and members. As well as content that supported fundraising efforts and demonstrated the RSL Sub-Branch network's impact and good works.

In 2020 RSL Victoria's digital channels achieved:



9,647,899 Total reach in RSL Victoria FB page

645 Total number of posts on RSL Victoria FB page



139,595 RSL Victoria website page view

42,384 ANZAC Appeal website page views

39,456 Poppy Appeal website page views

COMMEMORATION



How do we ensure the appropriate commemoration of significant events and anniversaries, when we can't gather and commemorate as we normally would?

As leaders of commemoration within Victoria, one of the biggest challenges that COVID-19 has presented the RSL Victoria network is: how do we ensure the appropriate commemoration of significant events and anniversaries, when we can't gather and commemorate as we normally would? In 2020 RSL Victoria turned to digital challenges to support and promote the commemoration of significant events and anniversaries, including ANZAC Day, VP Day and Remembrance Day.

ANZAC DAY

ANZAC Day has always been an event that brings Australians together and despite the significant challenges and uncertainty sounding the pandemic, one thing did not change in 2020 was that ANZAC still united all of us. In Victoria ANZAC Day occurred during a lockdown meaning that Victorians were not permitted to gather at war memorials and cenotaphs to commemorate the day as they normally would. Instead, RSL Victoria led Victoria in the first ever online commemoration of ANZAC Day. The happened in two parts.

- 1) At 6 am on ANZAC Day, 25 April 2020, Victorians were asked by RSL Victoria to #standto in their yard, driveway, porch or on the balcony and observe a minute of silence in respect for our veterans' past and present. Victorians were also encouraged to celebrate the ANZAC Spirit on ANZAC Day, by sharing commemoration through social media, using the hashtags: #standto, #ANZACSpirit and #lightupthedawn. There was an enormous volume of support for ANZAC on social media, for which RSL Victoria was truly humbled.
- 2) Victorians were also asked to watch a pre-recorded Dawn Service on either RSL Victoria's Facebook page or through the televised broadcast on Channel Nine, the ABC and Channel Seven.

It was RSL Victoria's great honour to create the 2020 Dawn Service; to do this we managed story boarding, production and filming, promotion, media relations and distribution. While we can't report on broadcast numbers, we can share that more than 50,000 Victorians watched the Dawn Service through RSL Victoria's Facebook page.

LIGHT UP THE DAWN

A wonderful element of ANZAC Day 2020 was that Victorians got involved on social media. Here are just a few of the stories that RSL Victoria captured from ANZAC Day.

Jack Hair

WWII veteran, 97-year-old Jack Hair proudly stood in his driveway to honour his fallen mates on ANZAC Day.

"It doesn't matter where you are, as long as you're doing what you think you should be doing on the day."

Jack served in the second 23rd Battalion 9th Division from 1941 to 1944 with the Australian Imperial Force in North Africa.

On the 16 July 1942 Jack was shot during the First Battle of El-Alamein. It was that same incident that proved to be fatal for Jack's section leader and quite a few others.

"I looked down at my section leader and was covered in blood. I yelled out 'Cyril's been hit!' Then somebody said to me 'So have you, look at your leg!' I didn't even know there was a bit of shrapnel in my leg."

He spent 18 months recovering in hospital and was then medically discharged.

Since his service, Anzac Day has come to mean so much to him. "I lost a brother during the war and I lost a lot of friends."

He feels especially sentimental at this time of the year.



Jack Hair

"I was recovering in Heidelberg Hospital when my father came to see me. It was Anzac eve the 24th of April, 1943. He said to me 'We've lost our son and brother, he went down with his ship in the Navy.'"

Jack goes on to explain the further tragedy that befell his lost brother.

"He was married, and he and his son didn't meet. He was killed in April, and his son was born only in December."

With 72 years of marriage behind him, his wife Joyce only having passed in 2018, Jack is humbled.

"We were quite good together. It would have been longer..."

Jack, like so many others, seems to be the epitome of the spirit of Anzac Day with his spritely demeanour, courage and good humour. And it seems he needs it, with two children, two grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild to keep up with!



Ella and Kayla Zlotnick

With a cruel twist to what has been almost indestructible Anzac Day traditions for over a century, Australians this year have looked to more creative ways to help commemorate the day.

Forced physical distancing measures amid the coronavirus outbreak has prompted people to take to social media to demonstrate meaningful additions to their Anzac Days and various ways to involve and educate their children.

In their time at home in Melbourne during the recent school holidays, sisters Ella, eight, and Kayla Zlotnick, six, came across a crafty way to make poppies, the widely accepted flower for remembrance and the inspiration behind the poem *In Flanders Fields*.

"We found instructions on the internet to use an old egg carton," said Ella.

"Mum thought it was such a great idea she got the carton out of the bin!" said Kayla.

They were soon engrossed in the activity, which prompted many questions and discussion about the meaning of the day.

With remote learning underway for all schools across Victoria for Term 2, Kayla has proudly been able to show her teacher. "A popi flour for Anzak Day," she wrote in her assignment book.

Their grandfathers on their maternal and paternal sides were both conscripted to serve in the South African Army during the 1960s and 70s. They have shared a few of the more light-hearted memories of their military service with them and now look proudly at the patriotism of their first-generation Australian granddaughters.

"It is wonderful to see them commemorating this important day as it plays a key role in the 20th-century history of Australia," said Rodney Phillips.

"We stand in silence for one minute to remember all the people who were saving Australia and all the girls who helped the injured soldiers. I think about the ones that died and people who went to fight for Australia and some people are still fighting," said Ella, who is in Year 2.



Jack Aghion

When Jack Aghion immigrated to Australia from Egypt with his family in 1959, he never thought he would befriend one of the very men who helped pave the way for his family's survival.

Growing up in Alexandria to Jewish parents, Jack vividly remembers visiting El-Alamein with his father when he was 10 years old.

"I have these visions of these fields of white crosses, really it was hilly, not just straight and it was just up to the horizon."

It was around this time he learnt of the critical role the "Rats of Tobruk" played in securing his home town and as a result, saving many families especially Jewish ones like his from the hands of the Nazis.

"My parents would have gone the way of other Jewish people and I would never have been born. That's very much in my mind."

Some 50 years later, wanting to give thanks to the veterans, Jack attended a commemoration of the Siege of Tobruk at the Shrine of Remembrance.

"I had to meet these men, I had to thank them, being very aware that my fate was saved by them."

Feeling emboldened, he seized the moment to introduce himself to a group of veteran Rats of Tobruk. "They were talking, laughing, they were quite jovial and I just broke into the conversation."

Little could have prepared them for what Jack had to say.

"Because of what you men have done, what you guys have done, I'm alive today. What you did back in 1941/42..."

Jack was met with stunned silence until Richard Charles Scales, known as "Charlie", of the 2/24th Battalion came forward. "He had a tear in his eye. He put his arms around me."

The two hit it off and a friendship formed. For the remaining six years of Charlie's life, Jack played a special part, even celebrating Charlie's 90th birthday with him.

Charlie is never far from Jack's thoughts. Every ANZAC and Remembrance Day, which just so happened to be Charlie's birthday, Jack pays tribute. And this year was no exception.

"I went to the end of my driveway with a light. I heard a bugle playing the "Last Post" some distance away. I played James Morrison's "Last Post". I played it for Charlie. He loved his jazz."

To this day, seeing a bottle of Charlie's favourite Dimple whisky brings a smile to Jack's face, and so does telling the story of his unlikely friendship with his mate Charlie.



Zac Cartwright

One six-year-old Victorian boy is on a mission to inspire friends and family, the young and the old.

Zac Cartwright from Cheltenham has a passion for history, particularly the two world wars and it's led him to put pen to paper.

With the help of his grandparents, he has researched and written two books about his great-grandfather who served in WWII, and his great-great-great uncle, a WWI veteran.

"I wrote the book because I want other people to learn about their relatives in the war and so more people can come to Anzac Day services."

And that's exactly what's happened. His books have been shared and his mother Kim couldn't be prouder.

"A cousin contacted me to say she didn't know these things about our grandfather and she's now using the book to read to her kids and they are now making poppies to give to their friends."

She noticed her son's growing love for all things war related when he was around three years old.

"My first thought was, you know, guns, tanks, and gore of course, but it was so much deeper than that."

The young history buff shares his passion with his grandfather, who tells him story after story about some of the best and worst characters throughout history.

"He was telling me about John Monash and Albert Jacka but also about Hitler and how bad he was," said Kim.

Zac would like his younger sister and friends to take away one message.

"They fought for us and died for us so we can have a happy life."

It's these sentiments that Zac will be thinking about on Anzac Day, as he stands in his driveway alongside his parents, each one holding a candle and his front fence adorned with a home-made poppy chain.

And it seems his hard work doesn't end here. Zac is already planning his next research project looking into more relatives who served in the First World War.

As if that's not enough for such a young man, he can also proudly recite the *Ode*.

"I wrote the book because I want other people to learn about their relatives in the war and so more people can come to Anzac Day services."

ZAC CARTWRIGHT

VP DAY

Saturday, 15 August 2020 marked the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII in the Pacific — also known as VP Day. Ensuring the appropriate commemoration of this significant anniversary, despite the hard lockdown restrictions that were enforced at this time, was a priority for RSL Victoria. In collaboration with volunteers from the ANZAC Day Commemoration Council, and the Victorian State Government, RSL Victoria was able to deliver an emotive commemorative service from the Shrine of Remembrance, that although closed to the public was streamed live on Facebook and viewed by more than 15,000 people.

RSL Victoria also produced a number of online resources to assist in the commemoration of the day including:

- a commemorative booklet that include two stories about wartime Melbourne and five personal accounts of wartime service from WWII veterans
- a commemorative poster with a custom illustration for Victorians to print and display in their homes
- a children's colouring activity
- acknowledgement and thank you certificate for WWII veterans.

RSL Victoria's commemoration of VP Day was made possible by a grant from the Victorian Government.



75TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC



Andrew Bishop was just 16 when he enlisted to serve in the Australian Army during World War Two. Andrew was motivated to enlist by the belief that soldiers were provided with three meals a day. Little did he know that his service would lead to an epic trek across Papua New Guinea, with almost no food and water, and only the company of a few good mates to keep him going.

Andrew Bishop

Andrew Bishop was born in England in 1924 and immigrated to Australia with his family when he was a toddler.

Working from the age of 13, but keen to enlist with the Army during the war, Andrew lied about his age. So, on the 11 July 1940 aged just 16, Andrew signed up at the Melbourne Town Hall.

Having spent his early years scrimping and saving, he was motivated by the belief that soldiers were paid good wages and provided with three meals a day.

After completing his basic training in Balcombe and Trawool, he was posted to Rabaul, New Britain in early 1941.

In the early hours of the 23 January 1942, Andrew heard the first rumblings of the Japanese landing. As flare guns lit up the dark, Andrew could see the Japanese dressed in dark singlets and shorts. With their motors off, they were paddling their barges into the beach.

"When our guns were firing at them there was a lot of yelling and squealing. It seemed they got a surprise.

"We kept firing and used quite a few belts of ammunition as the barges were coming in. I could then see they were trying to land on our left flank. The Japanese were firing quite a few shells from their warships."

As the hours went by and daybreak came, they were given orders to get out. With no plans in place for a withdrawal, it was each man for himself. And so began the next three harrowing months, which saw Andrew team up with a handful of mates to fight for their lives. They covered treacherous terrain on foot in tropical weather and faced repeated enemy attacks.

"The next thing there was a Jap seaplane painted red flying towards us and dropped a bomb in the plantation. It shook the hell out of us."

At one point in his escape, Andrew and three mates had to make it to Pondo on the other side of the island, where there was hope of getting on a boat. But hope faded when the boat they boarded broke down just a few kilometres out to sea and got stuck on a reef.

"When we did get the boat off the reef, we still couldn't get the motor running and were drifting. We pulled floorboards off the deck to use as paddles."

They had to muster everything within themselves to soldier on for over 300 kilometres to Talasea, further south on the island.

"One of the boys shot a water buffalo. A few of us gave a hand to get the carcass off, so we could get a good

slab of steak to put on hot coals. It was the first bit of fresh meat we tasted for months. We suffered after as most of us got dysentery."

Andrew eventually arrived back in Cairns in April 1942 — suffering from starvation, malaria and wearing the same clothes he'd been wearing for the past three months.

"We marched up the main street of Cairns looking like hobos. The people watching us must have wondered where we came from."

Not home for even a day, Andrew became so ill his father called for an ambulance. He was taken to Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and then to recuperate in an Army hospital near Ballarat.

He transferred to B Company 2/2nd Battalion and was posted to New Guinea as a machine gunner. Wounded during an invasion, he was unable to return to the frontline, suffering from bullet fragments in his one lung.

Andrew has special memories of the mates he served with.

"Friendships were important because when we were going into fight, none of us knew whether they were going to survive, so they relied on each other. It might be the last time we saw our mates."



John Hook

John Hook was born on 20 October 1925 in the United Kingdom and came to Australia with his parents a year later.

With no intention of going to university, he finished Year 11 at Melbourne Boys High School in 1941 and got a job at the Commonwealth Bank as a junior clerk.

But a strong sense of duty to his country led him to enlist with the Army in January 1944.

“That’s really what it was, I think we all had that feeling and wanted to do the right thing. Not to ever glamorise it, but that’s probably what motivated us.”

Breaking the news to his mother is his strongest memory of that time.

“She was horrified, particularly that I’d volunteered, I hadn’t been called up, she found that a bit hard to take.”

He completed his Infantry Training at Cowra in New South Wales and was eventually deployed to Lae, Papua New Guinea, and then to the War Crimes Commission in Rabaul, New Britain, where he worked as an interpreter as part of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service, having learnt Japanese.

While the then teenager was lucky his service did not put him on the frontline, it proved to be horrific, nonetheless.

“Shortly after the end of WW2, I was at Rabaul, capital of New Britain, attached to the War Crimes Commission operating there.”

John Hook enlisted to serve in WWII. But it is when the war ended that his story began.

It was his job to act as an interpreter for the trials of Japanese soldiers accused of war crimes. Many of them were eventually executed for their crimes. “The very first time it was pretty traumatic. They’re fellow human beings and although guilty of some horrific war crimes, you’re still telling someone they’re going to be executed tomorrow.”

In one of the major trials he was involved in included the officers responsible for the deaths of Australian Prisoners of War during the well-known Sandakan death marches in Borneo.

He tells stories about his encounters with the likes of General Imamura, who was the Senior Japanese General in the South West Pacific during WWII. General Imamura was eventually tried on the charge of having been responsible for all the war crimes committed in the entire South West Pacific.

In the course of John’s interpreting duties on Rabaul, he also encountered Lieutenant Hideo Katayama from the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Lieutenant Katayama surrendered himself to Allied authorities in February 1946, after discovering that he was wanted for questioning, accused of killing a Royal Australian Airforce pilot.

Apparently feeling sorry for Lieutenant Katayama, John gave him three cigarettes.

“When our paths next met shortly afterwards, he gave me three Japanese bank notes, with the comment that ‘a man about to die has no need of money.’”

After discharging from the Army in 1947, keen to get back home to his parents and wanting to be a civilian again, John gratefully but unexpectedly went to study commerce at Melbourne University under the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme.

“I could make a bit more of myself because I was just a working class kid at that stage, well, I still am, but it meant that greater opportunities in life beckoned.”

It gave him the opportunity to have a stable career for many years thereafter, working for Shell and Repco, and combined with his Japanese expertise, he was tasked with developing international business relations.

He is grateful for the tight bonds he formed with a few mates during his service years.

“We called ourselves the ‘We Three.’ They were going through similar experiences. It was quite an important relationship.”

They continued their friendships long after the war ended.

He was married to Mary for 62 years. They had four children, ten grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

In this, the 75th year since the War ended, John is reflective.

“Looking back at all the experiences I’ve had and the fact that it was such a brutal, pointless war. I think that’s the main thing about it because most soldiers really think war is just a terrible thing.”

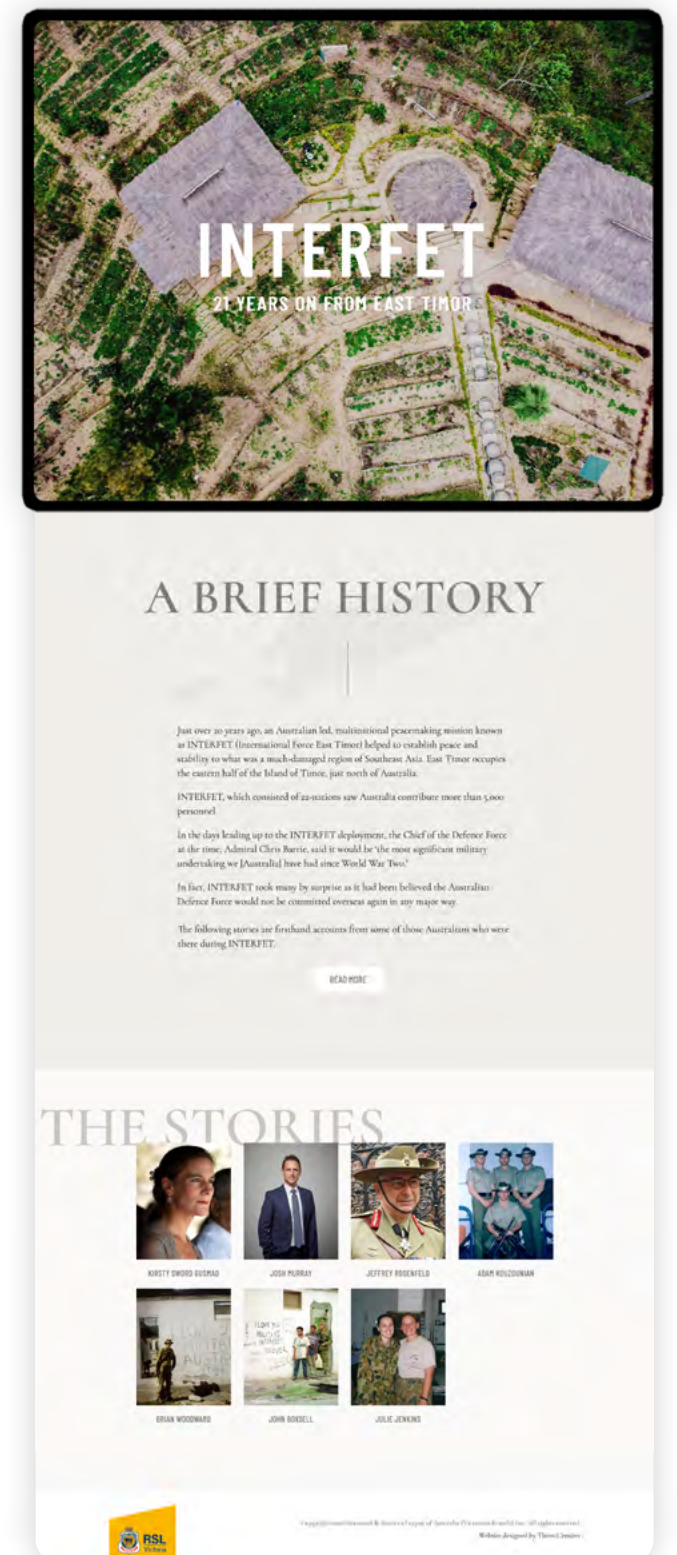
INTERFET

Just over 20 years ago, an Australian-led, multinational peacemaking mission known as INTERFET (International Force East Timor) helped to establish peace and stability to what was a much-damaged region of Southeast Asia. East Timor occupies the eastern half of the island of Timor, just north of Australia.

Planning for the “INTERFET 21 years since East Timor” commemorative campaign began in late 2019, the team at RSL Victoria saw this campaign as an opportunity to both engage with the post-1990’s veteran cohort, and undertake significant commemorative and storytelling activity outside of the *Mufti* schedule. In planning the campaign, one of the hurdles that we needed to find a way to overcome was the lack of public awareness of INTERFET.

Although a significant event in Australia’s military history, INTERFET was soon overshadowed by both the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Overcoming the lack of public awareness meant that the campaign would need to be designed in such a way that it would also be an educational experience for the audience, not just commemorative. In planning that campaign we considered a number of ways to commemorate, ultimately deciding the best way to tell the story of INTERFET would be to create a distinct and independent ‘microsite’ that had the flexibility to be executed across a range of communication channels: interfet.rslvic.com.au

On 20 September 2020 we launched the microsite to the public. The site features seven stories, some of our members who served as part of INTERFET, as well as the Former First Lady of East Timor, Kirsty Sword Gusmao, and Australian Walkley Award-winning journalist, Josh Murray. You can view the full website at interfet.rslvic.com.au



PROFESSOR MAJOR GENERAL JEFFERY ROSENFELD (RTD.)



Confronting scenes were unfolding as many Australian troops arrived in East Timor for the INTERFET deployment. Destruction across the capital Dili saw bodies strewn in the streets and buildings burn. What many remember as an explosion of sights, smells and sounds, Professor Major General Jeffrey Rosenfeld (Rtd.) took much of it in his stride.

Professor Rosenfeld, a practising medical specialist in Melbourne, enlisted with the Army Reserve in 1984. He was promoted to Major General, ADF and was Surgeon General ADF (Reserves) from 2009 to 2011. He is considered one of Australia's most senior and experienced military surgeons and an international expert on military neurosurgery.

Working as a consultant surgeon to INTERFET, this was Professor Rosenfeld's fourth deployment.

"I joined the ADF to serve my country and when called upon to serve I had no hesitation but to agree to deploy. I just felt very excited to be going. Of course, there is always danger with going into a conflict zone and you're putting your life at risk when you go, but I'm prepared to do that."

Since the early 1980s, Professor Rosenfeld has volunteered his services in several developing countries and as a result, had become attuned to the unique needs of Pacific nations. What he saw upon his arrival in Dili in January 2000 was no surprise.

"To come into East Timor and find abject poverty, a lot of malnutrition, tropical diseases just as I would find in Papua New Guinea, with the added element of the military conflict and the war wounds and trauma that was going on from the fighting."

What he could see was a place and its people in a very desperate situation. It was a bleak scene, with infrastructure destroyed, buildings razed and chaos in the streets. But with an outlook like Professor Rosenfeld's, the glass is rarely ever half empty.

"The hospital was placed in the old museum of Dili because that was a fixed structure and that was converted into wards. It's always good to have a fixed structure because you can set it up the way you want to and you've got a roof over your head, and it can be an airconditioned space. Of course, there were tents set up as well and tents for triage and emergency care and even the operating theatres were partly in tents as well."

With little time to settle into what would be his new home for the next month, Professor Rosenfeld got to work. On call around the clock, he looked after military personnel and the local population's diverse health needs. Sometimes, he would visit villages in the mountains to deliver remote health care, including administering antibiotics and vaccinations.

Mostly though, he was based at the hospital. An average day — if there was one — would start with ward rounds and patient reviews. Nobody knew how the rest of the day would unfold. Emergency cases ranged from draining abscesses to orthopaedic surgery, stitching up machete wounds and repairing gunshot wounds.

"It wasn't just nine to five, it was full-on 24 hours a day non-stop. Obviously, we'd get sleep when we could, but it was very busy, all these deployments are very busy and very demanding on your mental health and physical health because you're on duty and on edge all the time."

Even during his rare downtime, the threat was always there. Despite living and working in a fenced compound which was guarded, Professor Rosenfeld remembers being armed all the time.

"We were all carrying our weapons outside and inside the base. We had to do PT (physical training) with our weapons. The PT was a circuit. The running circuit was around the edge of the compound and we used to run around with our weapons in the tropical heat. It was a good way of staying fit."

And just like the searing, muggy heat that hung over him, the threat of contracting dengue and malaria hung over him too.

"Mosquitos would attack you as soon as you got out of bed. Just swarms of mosquitos everywhere. It was unbelievable."

No day would ever start without leaving the relative safety of his netted stretcher lathered with insect repellent.

"We were taking, of course, malaria prophylaxis. The only way you can prevent getting dengue fever is to stop mosquitos biting you. We didn't expose our skin, our arms and legs, especially during dusk which is one of the risk periods for getting stung."

No matter how accustomed Professor Rosenfeld was to these conditions, he clearly never lost his empathy.

"Just being there and seeing the level of destruction, human misery and poverty and violence that goes on in a war-torn country. My heart goes out to the innocent victims who are suffering."

He adds that he always aimed to counterbalance the negative. A unique bond of camaraderie and mateship formed from working and living with the same people day in, day out, under challenging circumstances. Professor Rosenfeld describes the deployment as an exhilarating experience.

"The very positive element of being on deployment is that you really do feel part of family. You know that everyone is looking after you, your welfare. Everyone has got everyone's back and everyone has everyone else's welfare at heart. We're all trying to look after and protect each other."

There is no doubt that Professor Rosenfeld thrives on adrenalin and the reward of providing life-saving medical care to injured soldiers and civilians, having described it as "probably one of the most powerful experiences for me in medicine and in my life."

Professor Rosenfeld returned to Australia in February 2000 with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

And with that deployment over for Professor Rosenfeld, he got on with his work as a neurosurgeon in Melbourne, until his next call-up at the end of 2001, when he returned to East Timor as a consultant surgeon to UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor).



"You're there in the sense of a bigger mission restoring peace and wellbeing to that very troubled nation. So, you feel part of an important national mission."

JEFFREY ROSENFELD

JOURNALIST JOSH MURRY



Josh Murray was then a 23-year-old broadcast journalist working for what was the biggest commercial radio network in Australia. He was on a mission to deliver news of the unfolding political and humanitarian crisis to radio stations around Australia.

“What we committed to at 2UE was that I would go to Darwin and cover the arrival of refugees, but also of the UN staff. There were about 1500 UN staff who were evacuating from Dili into Darwin to set up the humanitarian aid effort there.”

As arranged, Josh spent about a week in Darwin covering the developments. That was until he was summoned to the Larrakeyah Barracks late one evening.

“A small group of Australian media nominees were asked to travel with the INTERFET force, which was being put together. It was all very secretive. We weren’t to return to our hotel rooms and then we waited overnight, camped on the basketball court floor. We really didn’t know what was happening. But all being journalists,

we knew we were in for it, we were up for whatever this was, but we weren’t quite sure what the opportunity was, except that it seemed that we would be travelling with the troops.”

The next morning before dawn, Josh witnessed a sight he will never forget, describing it as a massive industrial operation taking to the skies of Darwin.

“We bussed to the airfield in the dark. It was just Hercules after Hercules after Hercules lined up on the runway, propellers spinning, being loaded with pallets of gear and as soon as they were loaded, they would just tear down the airstrip and go.”

Josh, together with other journalists, boarded a Hercules and strapped in. “The pallets rolled in after us, so you know you’re sitting there with your knees right up against the equipment as it was brought in.”

Looking out as the Hercules came into land at Comoro Airfield, a barren landscape of scrub and bush stretched as far as the eye could see, the only sign of life was the Australian

troops crouching in the grass, weapons poised ready to protect the airstrip. As they taxied to a stop, the back door of the Hercules swung open, exposing an intense heat. And just like he experienced in Darwin, the noise and smell has never left him.

And there, from the side of the airfield almost drowned out by the roar of the Hercules jets, Josh’s first report crossed live into the Alan Jones breakfast program to deliver breaking news – revealing that the Australian military had landed in Indonesian sovereign territory, as it was at the time.

What unfolded over the next ten or so days proved to be life-changing for Josh in many ways, even though he did not realise it at the time. As he made his way into Dili, which he describes as a post-apocalyptic war zone, filled with burning buildings and not a soul in sight, they settled at the remains of the Hotel Turismo, which became the base for many of the journalists.

“It had been absolutely destroyed, set on fire, walls were kicked and punched in, the sewer system was all smashed and broken up.”

JOSH MURRY

To make it somewhat habitable, they spent the best part of that day cleaning and tidying. “I came up with my own lodgings plan, where I found a dining table and turned it over, so it had four legs up in the air and then the Army had given us mosquito nets so I sort of strung that from the legs and had my own little room.”

At the centre of the hotel was a courtyard, allowing people to freely move around or congregate. Up in the rooms, it was a different story. “You would basically get on your hands and knees to stay down because you would never stand up at the windows.”

Over the coming few days, the former hotel became somewhat of a work base for the journalists. “Peter Cosgrove (Commander of INTERFET) would come there or operate from there on a semi-regular basis. And all the leaders would come through there and do their press conferences.”

As word spread that Australian troops were in town, Josh witnessed a changing landscape. Refugees who had fled to safe-havens in the mountains started making their way back into the city. “Hotel Turismo is on one side, there was a road and then basically the waterfront. And that strip of dirt and grass between the road and the water all the way through Dili was filled with families camping and

putting up tarps. They would throw a tarp over a tree branch or with some string and there were just thousands gathering because they were close to the forces.”

Reporting the story was difficult at times, with journalists often targeted by militia. As Josh reported at the time, the murder of Dutch journalist Sander Thoenes was a stark reminder of the precarious situation everyone was in.

The very next day, another gruesome discovery. It became known as Dili’s so-called House of Horrors.

“One day, some kids who came and sought us [a group of journalists] out at the hotel, led us down probably around a 20-minute walk and we ended up in the house of one of the independence campaigners. It was a torture chamber effectively and there was a well in the middle of the house where bodies had been dismembered and discarded.”

The horror for the group of journalists continued.

“On the walk back there was a fire. I remember the discussion in this group – ‘Do we investigate, do we steer clear?’”

And then, as if out of nowhere, a Land Rover carrying Australian troops arrived.

“They were certainly not shy about conveying that things were heating up, that we were in danger and they ferried us back to the base.”

It turned out the fire was a trap. A 44-gallon drum had been set alight in an alleyway to lure the foreign journalists to the scene, only to attack them.

Focused on delivering hourly updates and crossing into various radio programs for interviews throughout the day, it was not until later Josh processed many of his experiences.

“To look down into a well in the ruins of this house and to understand what was there with dismembered body parts and the smell is definitely something that stays with you and it’s not something even in any of our reports we could convey the gravity of those discoveries.”

He shares story after story of the many life-threatening, near-misses he experienced during his time in Dili, always bearing in mind the fine line between capturing an honest story and taking unnecessary risks.

During these opening weeks of the INTERFET campaign, Josh was consumed by the lives of the East Timorese people. He saw his job as both a privilege and responsibility. The story had become so much bigger than a military operation and politics.

“Kids were there and they were trying to get to safety and once you saw that human side of it, you saw what really mattered in Timor.”

Like many of the journalists who covered INTERFET have shared over the years, Josh was conflicted about leaving East Timor and grappled with the decision for a couple of days. “When I left, I was in agreement with it. But as soon as I set foot on the Hercules to fly back, I felt it was the wrong decision. And I regretted it.”



With time to reflect, Josh realised it was the right time.

"I think any journalist leaving a story that is still unfolding would feel the same way....but the reality was by the time I left, things were settling into a more stable routine of humanitarian repatriation back into the townships and military operations that were not being met with the dramatic unfolding of the first weeks. Really important for Dili and Timor, but hard to convey to the general public. You could see life was beginning to settle, so that's why we decided to return."

Not only had Josh lost a considerable amount of weight, he had also lost perspective on the outside world.

"Having lived on ration packs for the period I was there, I remember standing in Woolworths admiring all the tinned food varieties, then having this moment of realisation that I was back in Sydney in a grocery store with easy access to fresh fruit and vegetables."

And parts of the job of his dreams prior to his INTERFET deployment, had lost some of their lustre.

"Having done this and being part of the INTERFET deployment on that morning, not just to cover it but to fly in as an expeditionary force in a scenario like that, was the piece that really impacted me. I did find that I struggled to readjust to daily news routines, and when I was deployed to bigger or longer-running stories after that, I really relished the opportunity."

Nonetheless, his hourly updates ultimately won him the prestigious Walkley Award for Radio News Reporting. The judges commended his ability to get and then tell a story in a direct and exciting way. According to The Walkley Archive, "The INTERFET deployment was a big story, one he managed to cover from the inside. He displayed courage, stamina, persistence and good news sense."

He is also particularly proud too that his entry was chosen because, as it mentions in the judge's commentary, "he managed to convey the drama and horror of the situation that confronted the troops." It was an insight into life on the line for Australian troops that Josh will never forget.

"They were away from their families, and that they were facing this risk, but they were deadly serious about what they were doing and you knew that commitment to do the right thing was actually driving the Force all the way through.

"We're proud of the way the team brought peace to a horrific situation. And it's not been an easy journey since. But that was a very brave group and well organised and well run that moved in there in September 1999 and conducted themselves with the utmost professionalism."

For Josh, his experience was ultimately one that triggered a new chapter in his life, moving on from the world of broadcasting to communications and political roles and then eventually relocating to the United Kingdom, where he is now a London-based director for global construction company Laing O'Rourke.

But there is no doubt that his stint in East Timor helped to shape the impressionable and less than invincible young man that he was. To this day, he is often driven both professionally and personally by the life lessons he walked away with.

"I think for me it's been the hallmark of just being able to adapt. I went there to tell a story, one that required you to put yourself as much as you could in the shoes of the people you saw, whether it be the soldiers or the refugees and the people who had suffered. You always have to have that empathy with what other people are doing."

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Remembrance Day 2020 was another extraordinary commemorative event.

While small services were permitted under the Victorian Government's stepped approach out of lockdown, there were still significant restrictions around what could happen on the day. Although challenging, RSL Victoria was still able to put on its traditional Annual State Remembrance Service and traditional bugle playing in the CBD on Remembrance Day. RSL Victoria also supported the commemoration of Remembrance Day online through streaming the Melbourne Remembrance Day Service from the Shrine of Remembrance on our Facebook page.



KAREN MCDONALD

In September 2004, Karen McDonald, packed up her life in Brisbane and headed off on a secret deployment to war-torn Iraq.

The now retired Royal Australian Airforce Medical Assistant Manager, or more widely known as a Theatre Technician, served for over two decades and undertook multiple overseas deployments and postings around Australia.

Unlike the pristine hospital conditions back home, Karen was met with demountable operating theatres and “dirt, blood, fluids and cracks everywhere.” Still, it was widely considered one of the most advanced hospitals in warfare history and the equivalent to top trauma care centres in the developed world.

The hospital at the Balad Base, north of Baghdad, was well equipped and housed highly specialised medical teams. Just as well.

“We actually had a guy that was shot... the bullet hit him and it’s sort of gone in through the side and slid along his ribs and set dead middle in the front, just grazed his heart. The cardio boys got a workout on that one.”



Karen McDonald

And a baby, or few, were born at the hospital too.

“I think realistically if someone got to Balad, they had a pretty good chance of being cared for.”

The types of trauma presenting at the hospital were incomparable to what Karen would be exposed to in Australia. During her time there, the largest mass casualty event saw around 54 patients in an hour as a result of an explosion that rocked a crowded mess hall at Camp Merez at the airport south-west of Mosul.

While gunshot wounds, shrapnel injuries, burns victims, amputations, were all par for the course, the vision of some are ingrained in Karen’s mind forever.

“A little girl, maybe about three or four years old, she’d obviously been somewhere that was bombed. She had a piece of metal fragment lodged in what probably was her nose. That was probably one of the worst.

“We had what I classed as the Donkey Boys. Two young kids riding on a donkey, the donkey stepped on an IED and were blown up. The kids mainly had limb injuries. Lovely kids.”

It is not that Karen’s own multiple brushes with death have not plagued her, or even traumatised her at some point in her life, but she admits she was closed off emotionally and just did her job.

Four months into her deployment, a surface to air missile came in.

“It didn’t explode but we heard it coming over the operating theatre. I thought ‘Oh, that’s close!’ It basically dug in out the front of casualty. We were locked down until the bomb disposal unit could do a detonation of it, but it was probably only about 10, 20 metres max from the oxygen banks, which were massive, G size oxygen cylinders. If it had landed there, we would have been cactus. There wouldn’t have been anyone left.”

Some months after returning home, Karen was posted to Malaysia with her family, which saw the breakdown of her marriage and eventual diagnosis of PTSD.

“Look, it was probably all an offshoot from Iraq. You know, you can’t go to a war zone and come back the same person. It’s just not possible....the ex-husband will tell you that,” she says laughing.

She was medically discharged after 27 and a half years in the rank of Flight Sergeant and has since focused on being a full-time mum to her three surviving children and eventually settling back in to her home state of Victoria.

Every Remembrance Day, Karen thinks of her grandfather who served with the Airforce in the WWII and was also part of the Occupational Forces in Japan, and her uncle who was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his service during WWII.

JOSH MADDEN

A life-changing conversation with a family friend led 22-year-old paramedic-hopeful Josh “Mad Dog” Madden to a life on the line.

He swapped his carefree life in sunny Queensland to become a medic with the Australian Army. His initial six years became 11.

His first deployment took him to East Timor in 2009 for six months and then in 2012, he was deployed to Afghanistan for six months. They were two vastly different deployments.

“Afghanistan was still like an active, war-like deployment with a lot higher threat and it was a lot higher tempo as well.”

With several fatalities in the couple of years prior to his deployment, Josh knew what was at stake. And, his wife was just eight weeks pregnant when he deployed.

Arriving in the middle of winter to a snow-covered Afghanistan, by the time Josh left mid-year, temperatures were in their mid-50s. While the conditions were far from familiar or comfortable, Josh also battled with cultural barriers.

“The value on human life is very different to how it is here. Quite often if we had a male or female casualty, we’d always get pointed towards the male first.”

He was based in Tarin Kowt but often on the move operating as the security party for any road moves within Afghanistan. Josh would always travel in one of the first two Bushmasters in the convoy, the ones most at risk of being struck by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).



Josh Madden

As a medic, Josh treated both military personnel and civilian men and women, with injuries ranging from sprains and strains to trauma injuries, including gunshot and blast wounds — nothing unusual for a medic in an active war zone.

To set the scene, Josh was part of a team at a temporary field clinic, known as a MEDCAP, set up by the Afghanistan National Army and Australian Army medics at Chuckajuy in eastern Oruzgan. It was the first medical assistance the remote village had access to in several years.

Josh won’t forget debriding the burns off a young boy’s head.

“At one point he just sort of pushed my hand away, vomited and sat back up again. The pain must have been horrendous, but he was just sitting there, taking it. I’ve never really seen anything like that.”

These are some of the people that remain in Josh’s mind, as do those he served alongside.

“You do become like family and a number of the guys I deployed with are still really close today, even though we live all over the country.”

Every Remembrance Day, Josh reflects on his own experiences and of those that came before him.

“We’ve had it quite easy compared to what the diggers in WWI and II, Vietnam, that sort of did. I just have a lot of admiration and respect for those guys and girls.”

Josh discharged from the rank of Sergeant in 2017 and realised he still wanted to fulfil a role as a first responder. The father of two is now a firefighter with Fire Rescue Victoria, happily settled in Mildura and a member of the local RSL. “They’ve put me in touch with Advocates or things like that to help me settle back in. They’ve been a really big support.”

THOMAS PARKINSON

Like so many Australians, Thomas Parkinson, or Parko, gave of himself to fight for what he believed in.

The fresh-faced 18-year-old with strong political convictions, signed up in Melbourne with the Australian Army in 1951 to serve in the Korean War.

"That's what I joined up for. It was as simple as that. My Catholic upbringing had me thinking about the communist side of things."



Thomas Parkinson

The now 87-year-old also greatly admired his father.

"My father served in the First and Second World War. He was in France in the First World War and when I grew up, like all my age group, our fathers were in the Army and it just seemed we had to follow. He was sort of my hero."

After completing training at Puckapunyal and Ingleburn, Mr Parkinson was sent to Korea on the 3 March 1952, via Japan, as part of the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. He turned 19 on his way there.

He knew where Korea was on the map.

"I had an uncle who was a prisoner of war during the war and he was sent to Japan. So, even as a young person, I knew where Korea was in regard to Japan."

And he knew that Korea was, as he says, "just in a terrible state of affairs."

Coming in on a landing ship, they disembarked at Incheon. "Well, there was nothing. All of the buildings, everything was destroyed." Now, it is one of South Korea's largest cities, with a significant industrial port, an international airport and railway connections to the capital Seoul.

After making their way up to Seoul, more destruction awaited.

"The whole place had been completely destroyed. It had fallen twice and been recaptured twice, so it took a lot of battering. It was in a terrible state."

The former Machine Gunner vividly remembers the constant attacks.

"It was non-stop. They just shelled us continuously. We slept during the day and we went out at night. That's when most of the action was."

There was a time during his year in Korea he thought he may not come home. After a short course in flame throwing, his section was delegated to an attack on a hillside.

"Shelling and mortars came in on the road, blew the road away and the truck went over and I ended up underneath the truck."

When he was eventually pulled from the wreckage, he thought he was paralysed.

"I couldn't get up, I couldn't stand. I ended up being taken to the Indian Field Ambulance Unit where I spent a week. There was talk of me being evacuated to Japan but anyway, miraculous, or whatever you call it, all of a sudden I got the use of everything again."

And that was it. Like nothing had happened, he went back to his Unit. "That's the way things go in warfare."

He spent his time in Korea living in harsh conditions.

"We lived in trenches, actually holes in the ground. When it rained, they filled up with water and in the winter, it was that cold that you couldn't touch a piece of metal."

Grateful though for those who paved the way before him.

"We were fortunate that the earlier fellows, 3 Battalion, they only had the ordinary Australian equipment, whereas we were fortunate they had developed different clothing for the conditions. The lads that went earlier, they were the ones that did the hard miles."

They lived off C-7 ration packs.

"In pack was three meals. All tins. Baked beans, frankfurters, all that sort of thing. Cigarettes also and there were sweets in it."

Crude methods were used to warm up the food as best as possible and in his gracious nature, he even complimented it. "They were very nice. They were filling!"

By the time his deployment came to an end, Mr Parkinson was ready to return home with the belief that it was a job well done. With the benefit of hindsight, he believes it now, too.

"We had done what we were asked to do. Hopefully that, in some small way, went towards making Korea the country that it is today."

Luckily for Mr Parkinson, returning to Australia was a fairly smooth transition, returning to the Army in the motor transport division, until he was medically discharged in 1959. He went on to marry in 1962, have three children and work in various jobs until his retirement in his late 60s.

More than six decades after he returned from Korea he continues to suffer from lingering trauma, but for the good of helping others, he openly talks about his mental health.

"You think you're tough enough to handle yourself, but I found I couldn't. Some of the people I've seen for help have been marvellous."

If it were not for the coronavirus, Anzac Day this year would have been his sixth visit back to South Korea. While disappointed he has not been able to return in what marks the 70th year since the Korean War began, his five visits have all played a significant role in his healing.

"It's been great. To go back and see how it has changed, see how the people are living, what the conditions are now to what they were in the early 1950s, that's been the best therapy that could have happened."



Thomas Parkinson

This year, like every other year on Remembrance Day, Mr Parkinson turns his mind to those who have been lost to war, and those who are still with us.

"It was the war that was going to end all wars, but it seems since then we've had nothing but wars."

The Korean War became known as the 'Forgotten War', overshadowed by politics, WWII and the Vietnam War. It was only in 2000 that a permanent, national memorial was dedicated to those Australians that served.

Speaking not only from personal experience of the Korean War, but also as the National President of the Korean Veterans Association of Australia, and the President of the Pascoe Vale RSL Sub-Branch, this grandfather hopes the increasing dialogue surrounding the Korean War will continue to grow and the stories will be kept alive for generations to come.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2020

PRINT PUBLICATION – MUFTI MAGAZINE

Since 1934 RSL Victoria has had a proud history of publishing our membership magazine, *Mufti*. The magazine had evolved over the journey and today it is an entertainment magazine that brings stories of commemoration, service and volunteering to life. *Mufti* was heavily impacted by the pandemic, as RSL Victoria was forced to pause the publication as an austerity measure.

In 2020 RSL Victoria published one edition of *Mufti*, and the magazine will return to a more regular publication schedule in 2021.



RSL VICTORIA STAFF AND SUB-BRANCHES

In 2020 RSL Victoria expended our communications capability by adding an internal communications function. This new element of the organisations was vital throughout the pandemic in creating communication strategies and platforms for keeping RSL Victoria staff and Sub-Branches connected throughout 2020.

Communications platforms included:

- eNews – a fortnightly email for Sub-Branches Presidents, secretaries and managers to share news and updates
- Staff Intranet also called the Staff Hub – which is both a resource hub and a place for staff to connect.

With the ever-changing landscape brought by the pandemic in 2020, RSL Victoria's State Annual Conference was held exclusively online. The conference was rescheduled from its usual date of late June to Saturday 28 November and hosted over 230 registered delegates from 84 Sub-Branches across the network.

Pivoting such a large-scale event to an online environment is no mean feat. There was an enormous amount of work behind the scenes in the lead-up to and during the conference, ensuring delegates from across the network were provided the opportunity to participate in the Annual Conference (which is also the Annual General Meeting of RSL Victoria Inc.).

In addition to the coordination and work from a dedicated team of RSL Victoria staff, a number of platforms and services were utilised to conduct RSL Victoria's first ever online Annual Conference.

RSL Victoria enlisted the services of Right Angle Events (Event Management Company) to lead the event coordination, specifically the technical specifications required to produce such an important event in a virtual environment.

Zoom was used as the video conferencing platform to allow delegates to actively participate in the conference agenda; Vero (online voting platform) was used to ensure transparent and live voting information on the day; and RSL members were given the opportunity to observe the conference via a live stream on YouTube.

Guidance materials were developed, specifically addressing how delegates could participate with various online functions and "dress-rehearsals" were scheduled, where a large number of delegates took the opportunity to attend these online meetings, to familiarise themselves with the online platforms and format prior to the conference.

This was an extraordinary event in what was an extraordinary year. The attendance and participation from delegates from across the state, adapting to a unique situation during challenging times, once again demonstrates the strength and unity of the RSL network.

SUB-BRANCH SUPPORT SERVICES



RSL Victoria’s professional Sub-Branch support services ensure that the RSL Sub-Branch network is well equipped to meet its objectives, and comply with legislative and regulatory obligations.

There are 274 RSL Sub-Branches across Victoria, and while all Sub-Branches conduct core RSL activities of veteran support, member gatherings and commemoration, these Sub-Branches are often categorised by the RSL Victoria by-laws that govern their charitable and commercial operations:

- By-law 10A Sub-Branches — These Sub-Branches perform all the required roles of an RSL Sub-Branch and additionally operate with a commercial hospitality offering bringing additional obligations to the community.
- By-law 10B Sub-Branches — These Sub-Branches perform all the required roles of an RSL Sub-Branch and additionally operate limited food and beverage services.
- By-law 10C Sub-Branches — These Sub-Branches perform all the required roles of an RSL Sub-Branch.

New technologies, and growing expectations from industry and regulators have posed complex challenges for the RSL Victoria Sub-Branch network. With these challenges in mind, RSL Victoria provides crucial training, services, supports and advice on:

- commercial hospitality and business development
- regulatory compliance
- Sub-Branch governance
- trust fund administration
- reporting
- property maintenance, renovations and procurement
- volunteer management
- membership support and loyalty.

It is important to note that as volunteer-based organisations, the majority of RSL Sub-Branches operating throughout the RSL Victoria network are led and run by volunteers. It is for this reason that RSL Victoria’s professional Sub-Branch support services exist; to provide professional expertise and advice to RSL Sub-Branches.

RSL Victoria does this to improve Sub-Branch outcomes and to help ensure the continuation and growth of the League in Victoria.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

RSL Victoria’s support, advice and guidance for Sub-Branches throughout the varying circumstances of 2020 was arguably of its highest volume and of most critical importance, despite the reality of government-mandated closures for large portions of the calendar year. Telephone, electronic and, where permitted, face-to-face support for Sub-Branch committees and General Managers in navigating the many complexities of staff stand-downs, operational closures, re-start preparations, external supplier liaison.

Outside of the challenges provided by the COVID-19 global pandemic, the RSL Victoria Business Development Managers continued to provide advice and support to RSL Sub-Branches regarding customer service standards, industry standards, budgets, proposed capital works programs and building developments, implementation of staff training and professional development programs, implementation of marketing and promotional plans and legislative and operational compliance matters.

GOVERNANCE, COMPLIANCE AND RISK

In 2020 RSL Victoria delivered a major outcome for our current strategic plan, being the creation and implementation of a Risk Register, Risk Management Framework and Procedures, and a Risk Management Policy, which form an important element of RSL Victoria’s risk management culture going forward.

RSL Victoria also provided the following governance supports to 10A, 10B and 10C Sub-Branches to help the Sub-Branches manage their legislative and charitable reporting obligations by:

- upgrading the Governance eLearning program to allow for Sub-Branch Committee members to undertake a refresher module
- working with the broader RSL Victoria Finance Team to provide building-related Patriotic Fund grants and welfare-related Agency grants to the 10B and 10C Sub-Branch network
- submitting 90 per cent of Sub-Branch Patriotic Fund financial submissions to The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) by the due date.
- facilitating the submission of AGM extensions to Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV).
- despite not being able to complete face-to-face governance training for Sub-Branch Committee members due to COVID-19, 75 Sub-Branch Committee members still completed the Governance eLearning module.
- developing and distributing of the *Treasurer’s Manual* for By-Laws 10C and 10B Sub-Branches. The manual was developed to assist Traditional Sub-Branch Treasurers to gain a better understanding of good practices and the law in relation to operating the Sub-Branch as a charitable organisation
- overhaul of Branch By-Laws 8 — Operation of the Sub-Branch Agency Account. This was developed to provide clarity around the operation of the Sub-Branch Agency and strong governance and protection of patriotic funds.

PROPERTY SUPPORT

RSL Victoria operates in a unique model whereby the majority of RSL Sub-Branch buildings are owned in a Patriotic Fund.* This means that the buildings are subject to various laws and legislation underpinning their use, maintenance and development/renovation.

To ensure compliance across the network, RSL requires RSL Sub-Branches who wish to undertake capital works to patriotic fund assets, or who wish to purchase/sell/lease assets and/or to borrow funds using the patriotic fund assets as security to submit their plans to both the Property & Legal team at RSL Victoria, and the RSL Victoria State Executive Property Committee for approval.

In 2020 the Property Committee:

- considered 85 matters
- made 50 recommendations and 13 resolutions
- approved 22 property improvement projects at a cost of \$5.18 million
- approved and managed 1 application for incorporation
- approved 1 property purchase for a sum of \$1 million
- approved 1 property sale for a sum of \$1,522 million.

RSL Victoria also supported 129 10B and 10C Sub-Branches to access COVID-19 support grants from the The Retuned & Services League of Australia Statewide Building Patriotic Fund, totalling \$485,000. The funds were provided to Sub-Branches so that they could undertake essential maintenance and repair to club rooms during the pandemic.

*Patriotic funds are a type of trust fund created after the WWI, when Victorian communities raised money to assist soldiers and their families. They provide welfare services and clubrooms for returned service personnel and their dependants.

RSL NETWORK REPRESENTATION

RSL Victoria plays an important role in representing the interests of commercial 10A and 10B Sub-Branches to government and regulators.

In 2020 RSL Victoria represented the RSL Sub-Branch network to:

- Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation
- Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
- Department of Justice
- Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission
- Consumer Affairs Victoria.

The Victorian Government Hospitality Industry Advisory Group (IAG) met frequently during 2020 with strong representation from RSL Victoria on behalf of our 10A and 10B Sub-Branch network that provide hospitality to members and their guests across Victoria. The impact of a wide and varied set of government-mandated shutdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 meant that the role and representation of IAG became critical to Sub-Branches' and RSL Victoria's sustainability.

MEMBERSHIP

RSL Victoria administers, in conjunction with our 274 Sub-Branches, five different categories of membership:

- life membership — bestowed upon certain members for exceptional duration of membership and contribution to the organisation.
- service membership — available to any person who has served 6 months or more in the ADF or its allies.
- affiliate membership — available to any person who has a family member eligible for Service membership.
- social membership — available to any member of the public via 10A and 10B Sub-Branches.
- community membership — available to any member of the public via 10A Sub-Branches only.

Members may hold a Lifetime (only available to Life members), Annual or Triennial membership term.

As a result of the pandemic RSL membership in Victoria fell in 2020. At the conclusion of the 2020 calendar year RSL Victoria had 178,527 across the state.

All members are administered on an RSL Victoria centrally managed database, IGT, that also provides members with functional reciprocal rights to entry and participating at all Sub-Branches throughout Victoria.

A significant proportion of the administrative work relating to membership management is completed by Sub-Branch staff and volunteers, with the additional central oversight and support of RSL Victoria staff.

In 2020, RSL Victoria Member Services fielded 3,260 telephone enquiries and processed 1,844 membership transfers from one Sub-Branch to another.

LOYALTY PROGRAM

RSL Rewards is the loyalty program operated by RSL Victoria and participating 10A Sub-Branches. The RSL Rewards program enables members to earn points on food, beverage and entertainment within participating Sub-Branches and then redeem those points on food, beverage, and venue vouchers and exclusive items on the RSL Rewards website. Members also have access to great competitions and prizes through the program.

The RSL Rewards program is maintained by RSL Victoria, and each year Sub-Branches choose to contribute to the RSL Victoria Rewards Budget. These contributions come from the 10A Sub-Branches who operate the rewards system within their Sub-Branches.

For much of 2020 RSL members were unable to earn RSL Rewards points, this due to the pandemic and related lockdown. In 2020 the RSL Rewards program issues over 170,404,654 to 117,630 members from 263 different Sub-Branches. There were points earned across 53 Sub-Branch sites.

RSL Rewards staff pivoted to using digital communications channels to engage and connect with members, in lieu of marketing the RSL Rewards program. Although membership to the Victorian RSL network dropped in 2020, the engagement through the RSL Rewards program helped retain many members.

In 2020, RSL Victoria Member Services fielded 3,260 telephone enquiries and processed 1,844 membership transfers from one Sub-Branch to another.

GOVERNANCE

RSL Victoria's State Executive (The Board) are responsible for the governance and strategic direction of RSL Victoria.

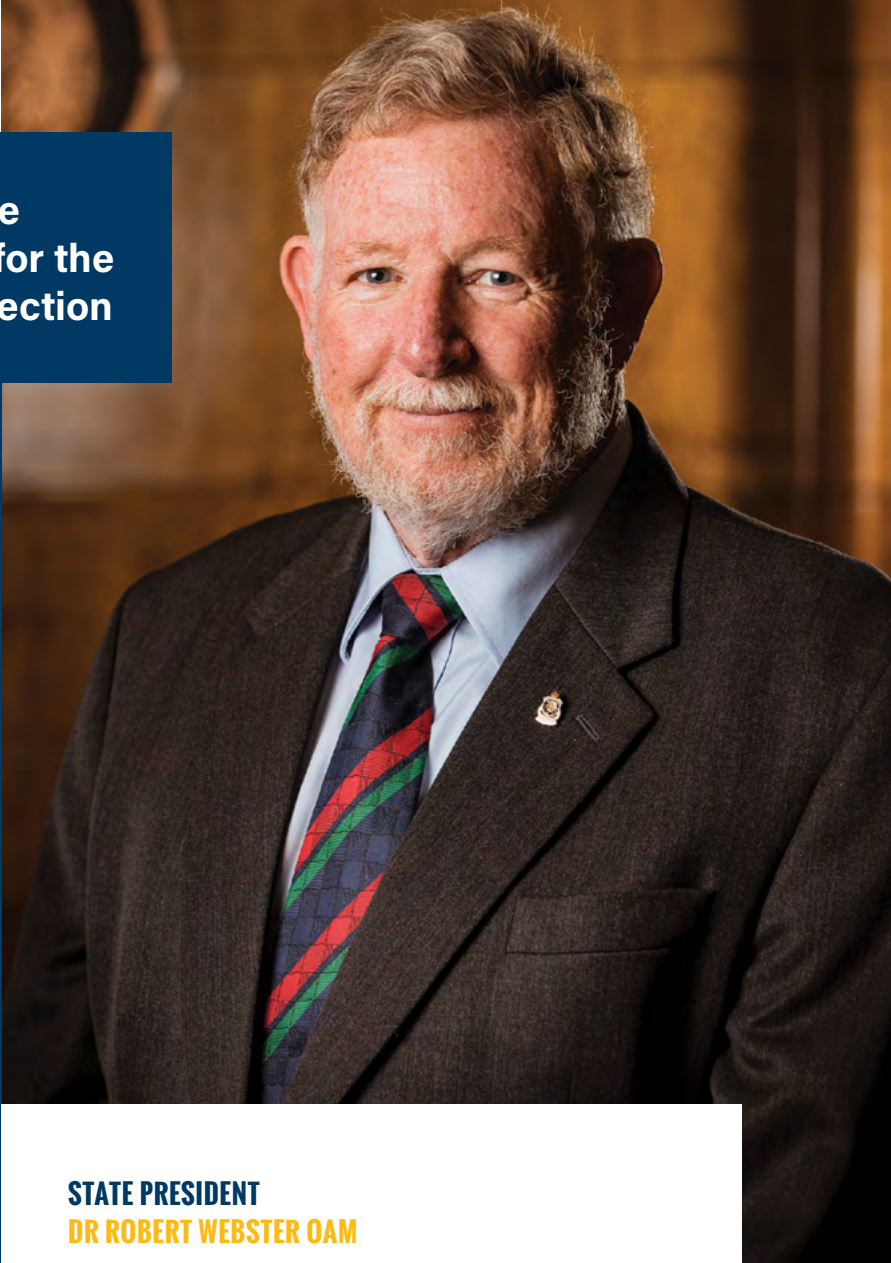
The State President is the Chair of the State Executive.

The State Executive's responsibilities include:

- Approving the mission and strategic direction of RSL Victoria
- Appointing and monitoring the performance of the Chief Executive Officer of RSL Victoria
- Overseeing and reviewing the management and performance of RSL Victoria
- Overseeing risk management across the League
- Overseeing veteran support activities
- Supporting significant commercial activities
- Establishing and issuing charters to RSL Sub-Bran­ches and overseeing the provision of a range of services to these Sub-Bran­ches; as the member organisations of the State Branch.

RSL Victoria's State Executive are responsible for the administration of a number of funds and entities and are trustees for a number of funds/entities including the:

- Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Incorporated
- RSL General Appeals Patriotic Fund
- RSL Statewide Building Patriotic Fund
- Welfare Trust Fund
- a large volume of Sub-Branch Patriotic Funds.



STATE PRESIDENT
DR ROBERT WEBSTER OAM

RSL Victoria State President, Dr Robert Webster OAM, was called up for National Service in 1969. He served in Vietnam with 26 Transport Company, Royal Australian Army Service Corps, from February 1970 until February 1971. Rob has been a member of the Returned & Services League for 49 years, with his original Sub-Branch being Henley & Grange (South Australia). Rob joined the State Executive of RSL Victoria in 1989, and he was elected to the position of State President of RSL Victoria in February of 2017, and re-elected for a third term in November of 2020. Rob is passionate about the RSL and its role in supporting Australian veterans and leading national commemoration.

The 2020 RSL Victoria State Executive included the following members:



SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
MR LEE WEBB OAM

RSL Victoria Senior State Vice President, Lee Webb OAM, served in the Australian Regular Army from 1968 to 1988. He became a member of the Greensborough RSL in 1992, where he has served as Sub-Branch, President since 1996. Lee joined the RSL State Executive in 2012 and has served on the Property Committee, and Commercial Business Committee since. Lee is passionate about supporting veterans and their families and was awarded an OAM for his service to the Victorian ex-service community.



VICE PRESIDENT
MR DESMOND (DES) CALLAGHAN OAM, BJ, JP

RSL Victoria State Vice President, Des Callahan OAM, was called up for national service in 1968. He served in Vietnam with the 104th Signals Squadron from 1969-1970. Since his discharge from the ADF, in 1970, Des has committed himself to serving the community. Des has been an RSL member since 1978, a Legacy member since 1997, a Justice of the Peace since 1998 and an Honourable Bail Justice since 1990. In 2000 he was awarded Lifetime membership to the RSL, and in 2011 he was awarded the RSL's highest honour, the Meritorious Medal. Des has served on the RSL Victoria State Executive since his election in 2016.



HONORARY TREASURER
MR JOHN CULLEN OAM

RSL Victoria's Honorary Treasurer John Cullen has been an RSL member for more than 50 years, having joined the RSL after completing national service during the Vietnam War. John has been an active RSL committee member and volunteer, helping to run RSL fundraising and wellbeing activities. Outside of the RSL, John has given his time in various charitable and community-based organisations including the 'Nui Dat' Emergency Accommodation, and the Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation. John was awarded an OAM in 2006 for his service to the veteran community. He formally retired from the RSL Victoria State Executive at the 105th Annual State Conference in November of 2020.



MR DALWYN (DAL) CROCKER

Dalwyn “Dal” Crocker, was called up for national service in 1969. He served in Vietnam with the 1st Armoured Regiment from 1970 to 1971. Dal Joined the RSL in 1982 and has been a volunteer and committee member of the Greensborough RSL since 2001. Dal was elected to the RSL State Executive in 2015. As a member of the State Executive, Dal has a particular interest in the governance of the League. Dal has served as the chair of the Corporate Governance Committee since his appointment to the State Executive.



MR MACKENZIE CRAIG

Mackenzie Craig was co-opted to the RSL Victoria State Executive in July 2019. He has been an RSL member since 1998 and was awarded Life membership to the League in 2015. Mackenzie served in the Australian Army from 1979 to 1999.



MR GLEN FERRAROTTO

Glen Ferrarotto served in the Australian Army for more than a decade before discharging in 2008. Since then, Glen has dedicated much of his time to supporting veterans. In 2012, Glen Ferrarotto founded Australia's first dedicated recruitment agency for veterans, Ironside Recruitment. Since that time, he has paved the way for a large number of Australian veterans to access and develop long-term, meaningful careers outside of the ADF. Glen joined the Montmorency Eltham RSL in 2015, and has served as Sub-Branch Senior Vice President since 2017. Glen was elected to the RSL Victoria State Executive in 2018.



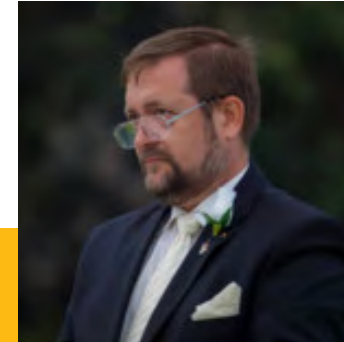
COLONEL MICHELLE CAMPBELL

Colonel Michelle Campbell was co-opted to the RSL Victoria State Executive in July 2019. Michelle is a current serving Army Reserve Officer (Colonel) with 30 years' experience in command, leadership, management, training and logistics. Michelle is also a Director of Argyll & Collins, a management consulting firm.



MR PAUL MCMAHON

Paul McMahon joined the Australian Army in 1986 at the age of 17. He served in the Army for more than 30 years until 2016 when he was discharged after being wounded in action, while on deployment in Afghanistan. Paul joined the Geelong RSL Sub-Branch in 2015, at the behest of his wife, Angela. Paula has been a regular volunteer with the Geelong RSL since joining. Through his volunteer work, Paul played a critical role in the establishment of the Geelong RSL Active program. Paul was appointed to the RSL Victoria State Executive in 2018.



MR ANGE KENOS JP

Ange Kenos joined the RSL Victoria State Executive in November of 2020 following his election at the Annual State Conference. Ange is a former Naval Reserve Diver and Navigating Officer, he is also a former higher education teacher. Ange is a motivated volunteer and has served on many boards and committees including the RACV, Eye & Ear Hospital, SIO/GIO Consumer Appeals Centre Lemnos Gallipoli Commemoration Committee, the Battle of Greece & Battle of Crete Council and the Greek Committee.



MR DAVID MARTIN OAM

David Martin joined the Australian Army in 1964 at the age of 15, via the Army Apprenticeship School. David resigned from the Australian Army after 21 years of service, during which he rose to the rank of Captain. David has been a member of the Rutherglen RSL since 1985 and served as its President on three occasions. David was elected to the RSL Victoria State Executive in July 2018. David was awarded Life membership to the RSL in 2004, and he received the RSL's highest honour, the Meritorious Service Medal in 2016. Outside of his RSL commitments, David has strong ties the community. He has been a Legatee for more than 20 years and has given his time as a Victorian Bail Justice and as a Councillor on the Rutherglen Council.



MR SIMON THORN

Simon Thorn joined the RSL Victoria State Executive in November of 2020 following his election at the Annual State Conference. Simon is a former commissioned Australian Regular Army officer who served in a wide variety of roles including in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has held senior roles at the Office of Police Integrity and the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. Simon was previously the Senior Executive responsible for regulation of the apprenticeship and vocational education sectors in Victoria. Simon is currently a Senior Executive in the national vocational education regulator. Simon holds a Master of Business Administration from Latrobe University, is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and an ANZSOG Executive Fellow.



MR ANDREW HANNIS

Andrew Hannis was elected to the RSL Victoria State Executive in November of 2020. Andrew served as a Reserve Forces Rifleman at Geelong Deakin University Company in 1992, he later joining the regular Army and became an ASLAV Armoured Vehicle Crew Commander. Andrew was deployed to East Timor INTERFET 1999. Outside service Andrew has worked in the construction industry for a decade to pursue helping veterans as a Wellbeing Advocate at the Geelong RSL Sub-Branch. During this time has served three terms as Sub-branch President.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)
MR STEVEN (JAMIE) TWIDALE CSM

Steven (Jamie) Twidale is a former Australian Regular Army soldier and officer and current serving member of the Army Reserves. Jamie has served in a wide variety of roles in Australia and overseas including deployments to Afghanistan, East Timor and Solomon Islands. Jamie was awarded the Conspicuous Service Medal in 2006 as well as being awarded an Army Commendation for Outstanding Service in 2007. Upon leaving the full-time Army, Jamie has worked in senior management roles within the SES in Queensland and Victoria. In 2015 to 2019 Jamie led the EPA (Victoria) emergency management program. Jamie joined RSL Victoria as CEO in December of 2019. Jamie is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and holds a Master of Business Administration, Postgraduate Certificate in Security, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies and a Bachelor of Social Science. Jamie is also a Director at the Victorian Veterans Council.



CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
MR DAVID RIDLEY BCOM ACA

David has considerable financial experience in both Chartered accounting and commercial industries. David joined the RSL in 2012 and is an affiliate member. In 2019, he was appointed to the position of Chief Financial Officer.

STATE EXECUTIVE ATTENDANCE AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The RSL Victoria State Executive governs RSL Victoria. An important function of this is conducting many committee meetings and consultative forums. Despite COVID-19-related public health restrictions that prevent the physical attendance at meetings, the State Executive were able

to continue their governance commitments via online meetings. The below list of meetings represents the enormous commitment of the State Executive to the good governance of RSL Victoria.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Victorian Branch Calendar Meeting 2020												
State Conference												
State Executive												
Committee/Forums 2020												
Finance Committee												
Audit Committee												
Remuneration Committee												
Governance Committee												
Property & Legal Committee												
RSL Victoria House Building House Fund Trustees Committee												
Combined Business Services Forum												
Corporate & Business Services Committee												
OHS Committee												
Veteran Services Forum												
Veteran Reference Group												
Regional Stakeholder networking Group												
Regional Veteran Centre Project Forum												
Awards Committee												
ANZAC Day Commemorative Council												
Kindred Organisations & Unit Associations Forum												
State Presidents Forum												
National Meetings 2021												
National Board/AGM												

STEX MEMBER	POSITION	MEETINGS ATTENDED	MEETINGS ELIGIBLE TO ATTEND
Dr Robert Webster OAM	State President	10	13
Mr Lee Webb OAM	Senior Vice President	13	13
Mr Des Callaghan OAM, BJ, JP	State Vice President	13	13
Mr John Cullen OAM	State Treasurer	11	12
Mr Steven (Jamie) Twidale CSM	Chief Executive Officer	12	13
Mr David Ridley	Chief Financial Officer	13	13
Mr Dal Crocker	State Executive Member	11	12
Mr Glen Ferrarotto	State Executive Member	7	7
Mr Paul McMahon	State Executive Member	4	8
Mr David Martin OAM	State Executive Member	10	13
Mr Mackenzie Craig	State Executive Member	9	9
Colonel Michelle Campbell	State Executive Member	11	12
Mr Ange Kenos JP	State Executive Member	1	1
Mr Simon Thorn	State Executive Member	1	1
Mr Andrew Hanns	State Executive Member	1	1

**Please note Angelose Kenos, Simon Thorn and Andrew Hanns were elected to the RSL Victoria State Executive at the Annual State Conference in November 2020.*

**Please note Paul McMahon resigned from the State Executive in July 2020.*

**Please note Mackenzie Craig resigned from the State Executive in August 2020.*

**Please note Glen Ferrarotto resigned from the State Executive in June 2020. Glen was later re-elected to the State Executive at the Annual State Conference in November 2020.*

**Please note John Cullen, Dalwyn Crocker, and Michelle Campbell finished their terms as members of the State Executive at the close of the Annual State Conference in November 2020.*

**The primary responsibilities of the State Executive, its members, powers and functions are listed in the Returned & Services League of Australia (Victoria Branch) Inc. Rules: Volume 3.5*

VIC BRANCH 2020 AWARDS

Meritorious Service Medal

- John Biles (Seaford)
- Ted Roberts (Red Cliffs-Irymple)
- Roy (Neil) Slaughter (Waverley)
- Edith Stakelum (Bentleigh)
- Jack Thewlis (Shepparton)

Life Membership With Gold Badge

- Peter Cardwell (Wangaratta)
- Peter Fraser (Tramways-East Melbourne)
- Michael Gretton (Kyneton)
- Doug Heazlewood (Warrnambool)
- Peter Whitelaw (Woodend)

National RSL Certificate Of Merit With Gold Badge

- Gordon Wright (St Arnaud)

National Certificate Of Appreciation

- Nil

Life Membership

- Christopher Lawless (Briagolong)
- Murray Lewis (Caroline Springs)
- Alan (Tom) Storer (Merbein)
- Kevin Davis (Drysedale)
- Michael Tate (Daylesford)
- Henry Berry (Nhill)
- Maxwell Carland (Nhill)
- Florence Craig (Nhill)
- Donald George (Morwell)
- Steve Kyritsis (Hellenic)
- Leslie Shard (Shepparton)
- Peter Martin (Shepparton)

Honorary Life Membership

- Barry Thompson (Greensborough)

Women's Auxiliary Life Membership

- Nil

50 Year Long Service Award

- Albert William Slatterie (Cobram-Barooga)
- Robert Jay (Ouyen)
- Ian Hastings (Ouyen)
- Maurice Munro (Ouyen)
- Alan Floyd (Ouyen)
- Walter Carland (Nhill)
- Laurence Hannett (Stawell)
- Philip (Ross) Howell (Morwell)
- Ken Myers (Dromana/Red Hill)
- Gregory Mead (Phillip Island)

60 Year Long Service Award

- Nil

75 Year Long Service Award

- Leslie William Cole (Kiewa)

Anzac Of The Year

- Karen Christensen

SUB-BRANCHES THAT
TURNED 100 IN 2020

Apollo Bay	1 January 1920
Bairnsdale	1 July 1920
Ballarat	1 January 1920
Box Hill	1 January 1920
Castlemaine	1 July 1920
Clunes	20 January 1920
Cranbourne	20 March 1920
Darebin (Fairfield)	1 July 1920
Daylesford	1 January 1920
Essendon	1 January 1920
Footscray	18 January 1920
Frankston	1 January 1920
Geelong	1 January 1920
Hawthorn	1 January 1920
Healesville	13 July 1920
Kew	1 January 1920
Korumburra	1 January 1920

Lilydale	1 January 1920
Maldon	20 May 1920
Melbourne	12th January 1920
Mornington	1 January 1920
Mortlake	30 January 1920
Murtoa	31 January 1920
Oakleigh-Carnegie	1 January 1920
Orbost	1 July 1920
Prahran	1 January 1920
Richmond	1 January 1920
Sorrento-Portsea	1 January 1920
St Kilda	1 January 1920
Sunshine	1 January 1920
Tongala	1 July 1920
Toora	24 March 1920
Warrandyte	1 October 1920
Wycheproof	11 November 1920





RSL
Victoria

RSL VICTORIA

**Returned & Services League
of Australia (Victoria Branch) Inc.**

ANZAC House
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