

MINISTER FOR VETERANS

Amending the Veterans' Support Regulations: Updates to the list of Treatment Providers

June 2025

This paper seeks agreement to amendments to the list of treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- May 2025 Cabinet Economic Policy Committee Minute of Decision: *Amending the Veterans' Support Regulations: Updates to the List of Treatment Providers* [ECO-25-MIN-0058]; and
- The associated Cabinet Paper: *Changes to Part One of the Veterans' Support Regulations – Treatment Providers*;

This pack has been released on the New Zealand Defence Force website, available at: www.nzdf.mil.nz/nzdf/search-our-libraries/documents/?document-type=Official+information&sort=relevance.

No information has been withheld.



Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Minute of Decision

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Amending the Veterans' Support Regulations: Updates to the List of Treatment Providers

Portfolio **Veterans**

On 7 May 2025, the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee:

- 1 **noted** that the paper under ECO-25-SUB-0058 proposes changes to Part 1 of the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014 concerning Treatment Providers, to:
 - 1.1 update the regulations for acupuncturists, and audiologists;
 - 1.2 add regulations for audiometrists, Chinese medicine practitioners, and paramedics;
 - 1.3 add an umbrella provision for health practitioners who treat eligible veterans residing overseas;
- 2 **noted** that the above changes have received favourable feedback from the relevant professional organisations;
- 3 **noted** that the above changes are expected to have an immaterial cost to Veterans' Affairs and are unlikely to have a budgetary impact on Vote Defence Force;
- 4 **agreed** to the proposals outlined in paragraph 1 above;
- 5 **invited** the Minister for Veterans to issue drafting instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel Office to prepare amendment regulations for submission to the Cabinet Legislation Committee to give effect to the decision in paragraph 4.

Rachel Clarke
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon David Seymour
Hon Nicola Willis (Chair)
Hon Chris Bishop
Hon Shane Jones
Hon Erica Stanford
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Andrew Hoggard
Hon Nicola Grigg
Hon Scott Simpson
Hon Mark Patterson
Hon James Meager
Simon Court MP

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Office of Hon James Meager
Officials Committee for ECO

Changes to Part One of the Veterans' Support Regulations – Treatment Providers

Proposal

1. This paper proposes amendments to the list of treatment providers in Part One of the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014 to allow other types of medical professionals to be added to the occupational groups to be treatment providers; to update details of two occupational groups; and to add a regulation covering health practitioners who treat eligible veterans residing overseas.

Relation to Government Priorities

2. The proposals in this paper are related to the broad Government priority of improving healthcare. The proposals are expected to improve access to treatment for Veterans' Affairs claimants and ease pressures on some medical practices.

Executive Summary

3. In deciding whether to fund an eligible veteran's treatment, Veterans' Affairs must consider, among other things, whether the treatment provider is sufficiently qualified and experienced to provide the treatment required.
4. The definition of "treatment provider" in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 lists treatment providers drawn from the Accident Compensation legislation, and provides that additions to that list can be made under the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014, including (but not limited to) whether and, if so, the extent members of any occupational group are recognised by the Accident Compensation Act 2001.
5. Currently the Veterans' Support Regulations list *acupuncturists*, *audiologists*, *counsellors* and *speech therapists* as occupational groups to be treatment providers additional to those listed in the section 7 "treatment provider" definition.
6. The Accident Compensation (Definitions) Regulations 2019 (ACC Definitions Regulations) have recently been amended to add three new treatment providers (*audiometrist*, *Chinese medicine practitioner*, and *paramedic*) and the specified criteria they must meet; to update the specified criteria for members of

two groups of treatment providers (*acupuncturist* and *audiologist*); and to amend the scope of practice for a *nurse*.

7. I support proposed additions and changes to the Veterans' Support Regulations which will align with most of the recent changes made by ACC. The proposed changes will:

- 7.1 add three occupational groups and the specific criteria their members must meet to be treatment providers under the Veterans' Support Act 2014;
- 7.2 update the specified criteria for members of two occupational groups; and
- 7.3 add an umbrella provision concerning health practitioners who treat eligible veterans residing overseas.

8. Specifically, the proposed changes will:

- 8.1 amend the regulation for *acupuncturists* to recognise the Chinese Medical Council as the new regulatory body to ensure Veterans' Affairs funding continues;
- 8.2 amend the regulation for *audiologists* to align with the revised New Zealand Audiologist Society definition;
- 8.3 add a regulation for *audiometrists* as treatment providers to enable Veterans' Affairs to fund treatment provided by them;
- 8.4 add a regulation for *Chinese medicine practitioners* as treatment providers who are registered health practitioners under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003;
- 8.5 add a regulation for *paramedics* as treatment providers to ensure Veterans' Affairs can fund treatment provided by them; and
- 8.6 add an umbrella regulation which would confer a power for Veterans' Affairs to fund or contribute to the costs of treatment provided by treatment providers in New Zealand, or by an equivalent overseas treatment provider if a veteran resides overseas.

9. With the exception of the additional regulation concerning overseas treatment providers, and other differences listed below, these changes would align with ACC's recent update of the Accident Compensation (Definitions) Regulations 2019.

10. The other differences are:

- 10.1 Unlike ACC, I do not propose add a regulation for *nurse* since the definition of treatment providers in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act lists *nurse* (and several other treatment providers) without setting out any specified criteria and scope of practice. The Veterans' Support Regulations cover treatment providers additional to those listed in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act and sets out specified criteria.
- 10.2 The Accident Compensation (Liability to Pay or Contribute to Cost of Treatment) Regulations 2003 and Accident Compensation (Apportioning Entitlements for Hearing Loss) Regulations 2010 (together with the Cost of Treatment Regulations) have also been amended. These regulations are not relevant to Veterans Affairs as the Veterans' Support Act and Veterans' Support Regulations do not set out payment rates for treatment providers.

Proposed Changes for Chinese Medicine including Acupuncturists

Background

11. Currently, to provide treatment for veterans funded by Veterans' Affairs, *acupuncturists* have to be a full member of the New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists (Acupuncture NZ) Incorporated, or a registered member of the New Zealand Acupuncture Standards Authority (NZASA), be registered in some other medical discipline in New Zealand and hold a recognised postgraduate qualification in acupuncture in New Zealand, or a National Diploma in Acupuncture (Level 7) or equivalent according to the criteria for the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications.
12. However, to better regulate the practice of Chinese medicine in New Zealand the Chinese Medicine Council of New Zealand (CMC) was established by Order in Council under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCA Act). The CMC sets scopes of practice within which Chinese medicine practitioners may practise and the qualifications required. The scopes came into effect on 29 May 2023, and the CMC commenced issuing mandatory annual practising certificates from 1 July 2023.

Proposals

13. To ensure *acupuncturists* can continue to provide treatment for veterans funded by Veterans' Affairs, the regulation for *acupuncturists* in the Veterans' Support Regulations needs to be amended to recognise the CMC as the new regulatory body for registering *acupuncturists*. Until the change is made, there is a transition period where *acupuncturists* need to hold a practising certificate from the CMC and from one of the predecessor professional bodies (Acupuncture NZ or NZASA).

14. In addition, now that all Chinese medicine practitioners are regulated by the CMC, it is appropriate that the treatment performed by these practitioners is covered by Veterans' Affairs, consistent with the treatment of other health professionals regulated under the HPCA Act and most recently by ACC. This can be achieved by referring to *Chinese medicine practitioners* in the Veterans' Support Regulations.

Proposed Changes for Paramedics

Background

15. General practices in rural New Zealand sometimes employ registered *paramedics* to assist nurses and doctors to treat patients as part of the general practice team. This can help to ease the pressure on such practices. However, while the practice can be paid for *paramedics* treating health patients, paramedics currently cannot be paid for providing treatment to Veterans' Affairs claimants because *paramedics* are not included as treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations.
16. *Ambulance paramedics* have been covered by the ACC treatment injury provisions because they work under the direction of a medical director who is a registered health professional but *paramedics* working in general practices have only recently been added to the ACC Definitions Regulations.

Proposals

17. To allow treatment for veterans by *paramedics*, as treatment providers in general practices, to be funded by Veterans' Affairs, paramedics need to be added as treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations.
18. Now that *paramedics* are regulated under the HPCA Act, and have been added to ACC's Definitions Regulations, it is appropriate to add them as registered health professionals in the Veterans' Support Regulations to ensure treatment of veterans by *paramedics* in general practices will be covered by the Veterans' Affairs provisions.

Proposed Changes for Audiology

Background

19. Currently, Veterans' Affairs funds the diagnosis of veterans' service-related hearing loss and the provision of hearing aids and appliances to alleviate such hearing loss given *audiologists* are defined as treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations.
20. *Audiometrists* are qualified to undertake the same work as *audiologists* for routine adult cases and can be funded by the health system. However,

audiometrists currently are not included as treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations.

21. Allowing *audiometrists* to undertake Veterans' Affairs funded work should improve access to treatment for some veterans. While audiological services are readily available in the main centres, there can be significant wait times in some regions and allowing *audiometrists* to undertake Veterans' Affairs work may ease these.
22. The professional body for *audiologists* and *audiometrists*, the New Zealand Audiological Society (NZAS), recently changed its constitution to describe its two types of fully admitted members as Audiologist Members and Audiometrist Members. However, the Veterans' Support Regulations still uses the prior terminology to define an *audiologist* as a full member of NZAS.

Proposals

23. To allow *audiometrists* to be funded by Veterans' Affairs as treatment providers, *audiometrists* need to be added as treatment providers in the Veterans' Support Regulations.
24. The regulation for *audiologists* needs to be amended to align with the updated NZAS constitution and the ACC Definitions Regulations.

Proposed New Umbrella Provision for Health Practitioners who Treat Eligible Veterans Residing Overseas

Background

25. Veterans' Affairs covers treatment costs for eligible New Zealand veterans living overseas. There is currently no provision under Part 1 of the Veterans' Support Regulations covering *Treatment Providers* to clarify how an overseas treatment provider would be funded.

Proposal

26. It is proposed to add an additional umbrella provision in the regulations for treatment providers applying to all groups in the subsequent regulations. The provision would refer to a power for Veterans' Affairs to fund or contribute to the costs of treatment provided by treatment providers in New Zealand or, if a veteran resides overseas, by an equivalent overseas treatment provider.

Cost-of-Living Implications

27. The proposals are expected to have a neutral impact on the cost of living with the proposals neither likely to raise or lower the cost of treatment for Veterans' Affairs claimants.

Financial Implications

28. The proposed amendments to the Veterans' Support Regulations will have no adverse effect on veterans' entitlements, and are unlikely to have a budgetary impact on Vote Defence Force. The changes are expected to improve access to treatment in some areas by increasing the range of treatment providers able to provide Veterans' Affairs funded treatment. This may result in Veterans' Affairs eligible clients receiving their treatment more rapidly. However, it is unlikely to be a factor in any increase in the number of clients eligible for and receiving Veterans' Affairs funded treatment.
29. Approximately 6,250 veterans are receiving impairment compensation based on having an accepted service-related condition. The number of veterans who would access treatment by the proposed additional treatment providers would be smaller subsets of this overall 6,250 figure, depending on the illness/injury in question.

Legislative Implications

30. If the proposed changes are agreed, the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014 would need to be amended. If approved, the amended regulations are expected to come into force on 31 July 2025.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

31. The Ministry for Regulation has determined that this proposal is exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that it has no or only minor impacts on businesses, individuals, and not-for-profit entities.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

32. The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this proposal as the threshold for significance is not met.

Population Implications

33. The proposals presented are likely to have a proportionate impact on the veteran population given they aim to maintain or improve access to treatment.
34. Access to medical treatment is more difficult in rural and regional areas because it is generally more difficult to fill vacancies for qualified medical staff in these areas. Some of the proposals are expected to improve access to treatment in such area by increasing the range of treatment providers able to provide treatment funded by Veterans' Affairs.

Human Rights

35. The proposals contained in this paper are consistent with the principles of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Use of External Resources

36. No external resources will be required to implement these changes.

Consultation

Government Consultation

37. This paper has been consulted with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Enterprise (MBIE).

Public Consultation

38. MBIE conducted public consultation on ACC's behalf on their proposed changes from 18 April to 16 May 2004. Around 200 submissions were received from a range of people associated with the health occupations affected by their proposed changes. Most submissions were in favour.
39. Since the proposed changes to the Veterans' Support Regulations substantively duplicate those made in the ACC Definitions Regulations, I conducted a limited consultation in January 2025 by writing letters to the relevant professional associations. I received favourable responses to the proposed changes from the Chinese Medical Council of New Zealand, Acupuncture NZ, the New Zealand Audiological Society, the New Zealand Hearing Industry Association, and the Paramedic Council.

Communication

40. The proposed changes will be announced on the Veterans' Affairs website and communicated separately to veterans' groups.

Proactive release

41. Veterans' Affairs will proactively release this Cabinet paper and accompanying Cabinet Minute.

Recommendations

42. The Minister for Veterans recommends that the Committee:
1. **note** the proposed changes to Part 1 of the Veterans' Support Regulations 2014 concerning *Treatment Providers* to update the regulations for *acupuncturists*, and *audiologists*, to add regulations for *audiometrists*, *Chinese medicine practitioners*, and *paramedics*, and an umbrella provision for health practitioners who treat eligible veterans residing overseas;

2. **note** that the proposed changes have received favourable feedback from the relevant professional organisations;
3. **note** that the proposed changes are expected to have an immaterial cost to Veterans' Affairs and are unlikely to have a budgetary impact on Vote Defence Force; and
4. **agree** that the Parliamentary Counsel Office should be directed to prepare amendment regulations for submission to the Cabinet Legislation Committee that would give effect to the changes referred to in recommendation 1 above.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Penk
Minister for Veterans