

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates
19 May 2022

PORTFOLIO: VETERANS

Witnesses:

- The Hon. Shaun Leane MLC
- Ms Louise Perry
- Ms Brigid Monagle
- Mr Anthony Plummer

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION 1

a) What is the total funding for the Shrine of Remembrance Grant Program, over how many years and how was it utilised?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Budget paper 3, page 209, shows a \$2 million cut in the revised budget figures from last year, which, according to the note, reflects the lapsing of the Shrine of Remembrance grant program as one of them. That program is not named as such in any previous budget papers. What was it and what did it do? How long did it run for?

Mr LEANE: I think it is probably easier to go to page 197 and the outputs for support of veterans in Victoria. Actually, opening this up, Mr O'Brien, you will see that from the last budget, which was \$12.6 million, this year's amount in the budget papers is reduced to \$11.5 million. Can I say, similar to a conversation we had for a previous portfolio, that the \$810 000 for the Mount Macedon Memorial Cross reserve improvements are in contingency as well. So therefore—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Sorry, Minister. I am just after some information on the Shrine of Remembrance grant program. That is all I wanted to know.

Mr LEANE: Well, what I can say is there is none—

Mr D O'BRIEN: It has lapsed, and I wanted to know what it was and how much it was.

Mr LEANE: I can say that we have not cut any grants program. We have maintained—

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, no. I did not ask about it being cut. It says in the budget papers that it 'reflects the lapsing of the Shrine of Remembrance grant program'. With respect, Minister, this is why I asked the department, because we are 2½ minutes in and I am no closer to answering the question. I just want to know what it was and how much it was.

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Mr D O'BRIEN: I know it is still in place. I am not suggesting that it has been removed. But last year there was money for it, this year there is not, and I just wanted to know what is going to be reduced. I might move on, but as I do could I perhaps ask, Mr Plummer, could I just get on notice what the Shrine of Remembrance grant program total funding was and over how many years et cetera and an explanation of what it did?

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr D O'Brien

RESPONSE

Answer:

The reference in the 2022-23 Budget Paper 3 (p.209) refers to the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund and the one-off capital grant funding for the Shrine of Remembrance. The Shrine does not administer what is commonly referred to as 'grant programs' and no 'grant programs' have been reduced.

The 2021-22 Budget provided the Shrine of Remembrance with one-off capital grant funding of \$5.95 million over two years for important repairs, restorations and improvements, with \$3.3 million allocated to the Shrine in 2021-22 and the remaining \$2.7 million to be allocated in financial year 2022-23. This phasing of one-off capital grant funding, reflected in 2021-22 Budget Paper 3, p.47, contributes to the output difference in 2022-23.

The one-off funding provides for restorations to the monument stairs, installing a ramp for accessibility and repair of the Shrine's four light towers. The complex work of removing stabilising and reforming the steps to the monument is underway as is the work to refurbish the light towers. All funded works are expected to be completed by June 2023.

The Shrine also receives ongoing operational funding which continues at current levels.

QUESTION 2

2. The ANZAC Day Proceeds fund, has less funds than last year, how much was it for, over what time period and what did it achieve?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Likewise, the same note suggests there is lapsing of additional funding provided to the Anzac Day Proceeds Fund. Now, that actually helps a range of welfare-related issues. What is going to be reduced as a result of the lack of subsidy for that program this year, in terms of programs for veterans?

Mr LEANE: Once again, that is not a program that has been cut at all.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, no. There was more money in it last year; there is less money in it this year. That is all I am asking.

Mr LEANE: The Anzac Day Proceeds Fund comes from sporting events on Anzac Day, and there is a proportion that comes out of those events. I think it is one-thirtieth of the funds that are generated on Anzac Day because of certain sporting events. It usually ends up a figure—and I am happy to take this on notice, Mr O'Brien—and I will get you the figure that it usually ends up a pretty constant figure around.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

Mr LEANE: We will get that to you. I can guarantee you, Mr O'Brien, that is still in place and that it does a great job in supporting—

Hearing Transcript, p. 5

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr O'Brien

RESPONSE

Answer:

The ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund is an ongoing grant program under the *ANZAC Day Act 1958*. It is funded from a portion of the proceeds of sporting events held in greater Melbourne on ANZAC Day. Because of the variable nature of funding sources, the amount available in the grant program differs year on year and was reduced in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on sporting events and wagering.

The difference in the budget outputs for the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund is due to an additional \$650,000 allocated during the pandemic to the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund and the Victorian Veterans Fund overseen by Victorian Veterans Council.

The additional funding was part of a \$2.2 million package announced in April 2020 to support ex-service organisations to ensure veterans received vital support in response to the impacts of COVID-19. This one-off allocation reflected not only the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on revenue available for distribution through these programs, but also the reduction in fundraising capabilities for many ex-service organisations, which were in turn supported through these grants.

Some of the funding for these projects was carried forward from 2020-21 and will be fully expended in 2021-22. This prior rollover of expenditure combined with the variable nature of sporting and wagering proceeds, explains the difference in output figures between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

In 2020-21, the Victorian Veterans Council allocated \$992,121 for 42 projects through the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund to support a range of veteran welfare projects, and 28 projects to the value of \$304,554 were supported by the Victorian Veterans Fund.

Projects supported in 2020-21 through the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund included: \$150,000 to Carry On (Victoria) to deliver welfare and education support to veterans and their families; \$50,000 to Bravery Trust to support FinWell, a veteran-specific financial literacy program; and \$46,486 to Warrnambool RSL to provide financial assistance to

veterans and their families and facilitate the online delivery of RSL Active which supports veteran mental health and connection.

Through this funding, ex-service organisations were supported to quickly respond to emerging sector welfare needs and to deliver commemorations in a COVIDSafe or new way.

QUESTION 3

3. The Veterans Transition and Wellbeing Initiative, how big is it, how many veterans are expected to access the service, how do they access it?

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Minister. In the veteran transition support, how many veterans are expected to access the service, and how can they access this service?

Mr LEANE: Yes. Are you talking about the public transport component, Rod?

Mr BARTON: No, the veteran transition and wellbeing initiative—how big is that?

Mr LEANE: Can I get back to you on that? I cannot quote for you a figure at this point or what the aspiration is. So can I get back to you—on notice—on that, if that is okay, Mr Barton?

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

Hearing Transcript, p. 8

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Barton

RESPONSE

Answer:

The Victorian Budget 2022-23 allocates \$600,000 over two years to support the *Veteran Transition and Wellbeing* line item, which includes:

- \$200,000 over two years for continuation of RSL Active
- \$400,000 over two years to support recognition of prior learning for qualifications and skills acquired in the Australian Defence Force through Victorian TAFE providers.

In the 2022-23 Budget Papers, there is also an explanation provided for \$600,000 over two years for the continuation of subsidies for free public transport for veterans and related cohorts to attend commemorative events and for events held during Veterans Health Week. As this funding will be transferred directly to the Department of Transport to implement on behalf of the Veterans portfolio, this funding does not appear in the total funding amount on page 39 for *Veteran Transition and Wellbeing*. This funding is included on Page 109 under *Support for veteran transition and wellbeing* as part of the Department of Transport output initiatives.

Based on historic data around participation rates, it is expected that the following number of veterans and family members will benefit from:

- RSL Active – This project is likely to reach more than 700 people each year, based on the RSL Victoria 2020 Annual Report (p. 16), which notes that in 2020 more than 700 veterans and family members participated in one of five activities offered at an RSL sub-branch or in an online format.
- Subsidies for free public transport for veterans and related cohorts – Thousands stand to benefit from the continuation of this initiative each year. Estimates are calculated on a base level assumption that at least 700 in Metropolitan areas and 1,200 participants in regional areas from the eligible groups will access the subsidy for public transport travel on each commemorative day between 2022 and 2025. These participation rates are expected to increase each year.

The Recognition of Prior Learning component is new in 2022-23 and will act as a pilot initiative available to Victorian veterans.