



AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'  
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

AVCAT submission of concern regarding  
service provision of the tertiary education  
needs of the children and grandchildren of  
veterans in necessitous circumstances,  
via the  
Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and  
Support (Simplification and Harmonisation)  
Bill 2024

**AVCAT**  
***"Transforming Lives Through Education"***

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## PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) has a concern that veteran families, in particular the children and grandchildren of veterans, in necessitous circumstances, will continue to have restricted opportunities of being provided tertiary education bursaries (scholarships) under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) in transitioning to the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA) as well as the continued restriction of providing similar **tertiary education benefits for the children and grandchildren of veterans from all conflicts and levels of service** under the MRCA.

## BACKGROUND

AVCAT believes the draft Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 gives the Government the opportunity to include all veteran families, no matter what conflict or level of service, the opportunity to be supported through tertiary education and the pastoral care which organisation's like AVCAT provide on behalf of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

The **negative intergenerational mental health effects of military service**, highlighted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, can be addressed in some respects by the provision of a supportive path to further tertiary education for children and grandchildren of veterans.

Since 2003 AVCAT has continued to administer and distribute the tertiary education bursaries to eligible children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans through the Long Tan Bursaries Scheme (LTBS) on behalf of DVA. The children and grandchildren of veterans who are awarded these bursaries are in necessitous circumstances, including financial need. The provision of these bursaries is currently only achieved through the Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES) Instrument 2015 No. R43, made under subsection 117(3) of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*.

These existing Long Tan Bursaries (LTB) for tertiary education, are restricted to the VEA and its accompanying legislative instrument. AVCAT would like to see this situation rectified to **enable the children and grandchildren of veterans from other conflicts and levels of service be awarded a tertiary education bursary** and provided with some form of pastoral care enabling them to complete their studies.

One of the best ways of 'breaking the cycle of welfare dependence' and the 'adverse mental health issues' which can become endemic within the dependents of veterans is to provide the children and grandchildren of veterans with the opportunity of tertiary education. The worthiest applicants are selected on financial need, academic potential, and overall deservedness and who, without financial assistance, would be unable to start or complete tertiary education. **Tertiary education enables the children and grandchildren of veterans to establish themselves in post-secondary education courses and after obtaining a qualification, enable them to support themselves through gainful employment.**

The Government has made itself clear that it is "committed to ensuring that Defence personnel, veterans and their families are well looked after." To achieve these aims the Government is looking at "simplifying and harmonising veterans' legislation". AVCAT believes that a Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme (MRCAETS) legislative instrument which is achieved through the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004, and any single act going forward, should accommodate for the administration and management of a similar bursary scheme to that currently provided for under the VEA/VCES.

## LEVERAGING AND UTILISING EXPERTISE

AVCAT has used its experience and expertise, during the past 20 years, in providing services to DVA for the administration of its Long Tan Bursary Scheme (LTBS) to **encourage the wider Ex-Service Community to provide additional funding for veteran families**. AVCAT has secured around \$600,000 annually to provide Sponsored Tertiary Scholarships to the families of veterans in financial need, no matter which conflict or level of service has been rendered to our country.

Organisations involved in the additional support of the veteran families includes, but is not limited to, Australian War Widows, Bravery Trust, Commando Welfare Trust, Legacy Australia, RSL Australia, RSL QLD, RSL VIC, Total & Permanent Incapacitated (TPI) NSW Inc, TPI SA, TPI QLD, Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia, Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia.

AVCAT monitors the completion rates of the bursary and scholarship recipients. **82% of AVCAT scholars have completed their bursary/scholarship, graduated, or are continuing tertiary education**. This is **far above the national average of 65%** of tertiary students who complete their tertiary education degree after six years of study. This 'better than average' completion rate is just one measure which highlights how AVCAT continues to provide a measurable positive impact to the veteran community and to DVA.

## LEGISLATION CHANGES

The harmonization of Veteran Legislation should include the acknowledgement and provision for Tertiary Education Bursaries no matter what conflict or level of service is provided by the veteran.

The Legislative Instrument Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme (MRCAETS) established under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA) should have a similar scheme as referenced under Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES) established under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA).

## EXAMPLE OF CHANGES

An example of the **proposed additions to the MRCA/MRCAETS Legislative Instrument** which are drawn from/like the ones already included within the VEA/VCES Legislative Instrument are noted below.

### PART 1 – Introduction

#### 1.2 interpretation

**Long Tan Bursary** (*or other name as determined by the Commission*) means the bursary that may be provided by the *Commission* under paragraph 7.4.2 of the *Scheme* to an appropriate *Eligible child or eligible grandchild of a veteran* in order to assist the person with their tertiary education.

### PART 7 – Scholarships

#### 7.4 Long Tan Bursary (*or other name as determined by the Commission*)

**7.4.1** The **Commission** may create a bursary to be known as the **Long Tan Bursary** and the Commission may determine the duration and value of the bursary and the number of bursaries to be granted in any Calendar year.

**7.4.2** The **Commission** may award a *Long Tan Bursary* to:

- (a) an *Eligible child* means the person described in paragraph 2.1.1; or
- (b) an *eligible grandchild of a veteran*.

**7.4.3** In deciding whether or not to award a *Long Tan Bursary* to an *Eligible child* or *eligible grandchild of a veteran* the **Commission** must take into account the matters in the document approved by the **Commission** and known as the "Long Tan Bursary Scheme Operational Guidelines".

**7.4.4** An **Eligible child** or *eligible grandchild of a veteran* who is awarded a **Long Tan Bursary** is not entitled to another Long Tan Bursary.

**7.4.5** A **Long Tan Bursary** may be administered by the **Commission** (administration power) or an organisation contracted by the Commission.

**7.4.6** Where the **Commission** delegates its administration power in Paragraph 7.4.5 to another person (for example, a contractor), it may enter into financial arrangements with that other person whereby that other person is paid to administer a **Long Tan Bursary** (administration fee) and any such administration fee may be drawn from the funds appropriated by the Commonwealth for the administration of the **Scheme**.

Note: pursuant to section 384 of the **Act**, the Commission can delegate its powers under the Act to, among others, to a consultant to, or an employee of a consultant to, the Commission.

## CONCLUSION

By amending the Legislative Instrument **Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme (MRCAETS)** established under the **Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA)** the Government will enable a similar tertiary education scheme to the one already in place under the VEA/VCES to continue to provide veteran families, in particular the children and grandchildren of veterans in necessitous circumstances, tertiary education bursaries (scholarships) to **establish themselves in post-secondary education courses and after obtaining a qualification, enable them to support themselves through gainful employment.**

## REFERENCE SOURCES

Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES)

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