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Minister for Veterans

REPORT ON THE INTERROGATION OF THE INTEGRATED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE TO IDENTIFY AND EXPLORE A VETERAN COHORT

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide you with an understanding of the work performed by Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Social Wellbeing Agency (SWA) to identify a veteran cohort from the data contained within the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)¹. This is an output from the implementation of Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau – The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework (Te Arataki).

Background

2. VA sponsored the development of Te Arataki in 2022. The completed report identified a critical deficit in both data and research regarding the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealand veterans. The primary limitation on improving our understanding of veterans in New Zealand, and their needs, was the inability to identify veterans within the larger population.

3. This gap made epidemiological examination of the veteran population difficult, if not impossible. This in turn limited both the quality and quantity of research performed on veterans in New Zealand.

4. Following completion of Te Arataki, VA engaged with the SWA to use new and previously developed tools within the IDI to identify a cohort of veterans and to perform a preliminary analysis to explore mental health and wellbeing indicators in veterans in New Zealand.

Progress

5. Working alongside VA, the SWA created a veteran indicator within the IDI utilising pension data and various employment markers to identify a veteran cohort.

6. The SWA utilised a broader definition of veteran than that described in the legislation deriving the definition from Te Arataki – those that have completed a period of service in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), irrespective of duration, who are no longer serving in the NZDF.

¹ The IDI is a large research database that collects individual level data about people and households. It includes administrative data about education, income, benefits, migration, justice, and health and comes from government agencies, Stats NZ surveys, and non-government organisations.

7. The marker was able to identify a cohort of 43,941 veterans within the IDI. The size of the whole veteran population in New Zealand is difficult to estimate in the absence of validated release numbers from the NZDF over time. Estimates range between 80,000 and 140,000. While the IDI sample does not capture the entirety of the veteran population, it is a representative and material sample of the whole.
8. The sample appears to be demographically representative of the NZDF; 64% of veterans were aged between 30 and 65 years, 72% were male, while 84% were New Zealand European, and 20% Maori.
9. During the period of the project, verified data regarding Vietnam veterans was added to the IDI. The SWA was able to use this data to validate the sample population identified using the veteran marker.
10. VA and the SWA performed preliminary analyses of two characteristics to evidence the utility of the sample in exploring the current and future needs of the veteran community; disability and employment.
11. Data collected as part of the 2018 census, the household labour force survey, and the general social survey allowed examination of the impact of functional disability on veterans when compared to the larger population. The analysis suggested the frequency and severity of disability in veterans aged less than 30 was less than that in the community, while for those aged greater than 65, the frequency and severity of disability became greater than in their peers.
12. Exploring employment data from 2018-19 allowed for illustration of employment characteristics of veterans in New Zealand. Overall, a large proportion of veterans, higher than the general population, had stable employment over the period studied. However, a higher proportion of veterans than the general population were not associated with any employer during the period. The data further allowed for an illustration of trends in the employment of veterans by industry.
13. These findings have been summarised in the attached report produced by the SWA (see Annex A).
14. In line with the requirements of Statistics New Zealand, both the veteran marker and the source code generated to interrogate the veteran cohort are available in the public domain.
15. These preliminary analyses signal possible utility in future research. The identification of a veteran cohort in the IDI will provide a resource previously unavailable to researchers, likely stimulate academic interest in the study of New Zealand veterans, allow examination of veterans' needs by relevant agencies, and potentially allow for the identification of targets for preventative investment in preserving the health and wellbeing of veterans.
16. The SWA authors are available to brief you in person on the results of their report.

Future work

17. Entitlement data ceased to be uploaded into the IDI from 2014, when VA took over processing from the Ministry of Social Development. In part this is because VA does not have any data science capability. As part of the current interagency work programme created to support Te Arataki, VA is exploring uploading historic entitlement data back to 2014, and recommencing uploads to the IDI on a yearly basis. This would enable a greater percentage of veterans to be identified.

IN CONFIDENCE

18. To ensure success, any future program of work designed to improve the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of veterans will be dependent on a knowledge of the veteran population. It was apparent from Te Arataki that the data to support this knowledge is not currently available to government or non-government agencies. The absence of data has critically hindered past endeavours to improve outcomes. The use of the IDI to establish a validated population of veterans in the wider community will allow for future interrogation of this population to identify and target the needs and vulnerabilities of the veteran population in New Zealand.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that the Minister:

- a. **Note** the analysis and report undertaken by the Social Wellbeing Agency.

NOTED

- b. **Note** the efforts by Veterans' Affairs to recommence data entry into the IDI to enable further research.

NOTED

- c. **Agree** that you meet with the Social Wellbeing Agency authors of the report to brief you on its results.

AGREE/DISAGREE



KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

HON CHRIS PENK
Minister for Veterans

Annex

- A. Building An Evidence Base for Understanding Veteran Outcomes, Social Wellbeing Agency, April 2024