

Are you a child of a nuclear veteran?



In 2023 New Zealand's independent Veterans' Health Advisory Panel commissioned a literature review on the health risks associated with nuclear exposure.

Families of those who could have been exposed to radiation may be anxious about what such exposure might mean. While the review confirmed the impact of radiation on a number of cancers it noted that there is no current significant and reliable evidence of intergenerational effects from paternal exposure. There will, however, be future literature reviews to ensure New Zealand is kept up-to-date with information about this.

Some children of nuclear veterans have previously been supported by Veterans' Affairs to access genetic counselling to help them understand the risks of their parents' possible exposure. Since March 2024, this entitlement has been extended, and now the biological children of all of New Zealand's nuclear veterans are able to apply for genetic counselling that will be funded by Veterans' Affairs.

Who is eligible?

The biological children of New Zealand veterans who served in:

- Jayforce in Japan after the Second World War
- Operation Grapple (observing British nuclear tests in the Pacific in the 1950s)
- Mururoa (where New Zealand frigates observed French nuclear tests in 1973)

What are you eligible for?

As a child of a nuclear veteran, you're eligible for genetic counselling funded by Veterans' Affairs.

What is genetic counselling?

Genetic counselling is offered by a specialist genetic counsellor who is trained to help people understand the risks and implications of a genetic disorder in a family.

It helps you to make informed choices about whether genetic testing could be helpful, what testing could involve, how the results and their implications can be interpreted, and the management of potential genetic risks. Whether counselling leads to genetic testing or not is something we encourage you to discuss with the counsellor.

The cost of genetic testing alone will not be covered by Veterans' Affairs – but Veterans' Affairs will cover this cost if testing is recommended as a result of counselling.

How can you arrange to get genetic counselling?

Most genetic counselling happens through Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand. There are some private providers, but they are generally limited to the major centres. Veterans' Affairs can help you and your GP access services, first through Te Whatu Ora, or through a private provider if you can't access it through the public system.

As a first step, you will need to prove you are eligible to have the counselling funded, by providing Veterans' Affairs with proof that you are related to a veteran from a nuclear deployment.

There is a form available on the Veterans' Affairs website (veteransaffairs.mil.nz) which you can fill out and submit to Veterans' Affairs, and this will begin the process for you.

What if you live overseas?

You can still access this counselling.

Please contact Veterans' Affairs +64-4-495 2070 and we will talk you through the process.

What about nuclear veterans themselves?

Genetic counselling and, if necessary, genetic testing, may be funded for eligible nuclear veterans as part of an overall treatment package for a service-related condition. This would be arranged through their case managers.