



Our people

Meet our Minister, leadership, and the teams that make up Veterans' Affairs.


Our Minister

The Minister for Veterans is the Hon Chris Penk.

Visit their profile on Beehive.govt.nz (<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/minister/hon-chris-penk>) 

The Minister's responsibilities include:

- declaring operations as Qualifying Operational Service, and
- appointing members to three advisory and appeal bodies.

Recent releases and speeches by the Minister for Veterans (<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/portfolio/nationalactnew-zealand-first-coalition-government-2023-2026/veterans>) 

View our Briefings to Incoming Ministers (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/about-veterans-affairs/our-documents-and-publications/corporate-documents/>)

Our leadership team

Bernadine MacKenzie, Head of Veterans' Affairs

Bernadine began her career as a registered nurse working in a variety of hospitals and community health services in New Zealand. She has over 25 years experience in the health sector, where she held a number of senior nursing and management roles. This included Manager of Community Health Services in Horowhenua, Service Manager at Hutt Valley Health and Director of Quality at Capital and Coast DHB.

In 2015 she joined the Department of Child, Youth and Family as General Manager Quality Assurance, later holding other key roles including General Manager Service Support and General Manager Youth Justice. In this role, Bernadine shepherded in the Government's youth justice Fresh Start reforms. This involved her nurturing strong relationships with NGO partners, and helping them build and strengthen programmes for young offenders.

She brings with her a wealth of experience in health, impairment support, social services and machinery of government. She's a very experienced public servant with a commitment to providing the best possible support to her clients and their families.

As the Head of Veterans' Affairs, Bernadine is appointed by the Chief of Defence Force in accordance with section 200 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 and section 61A of the Defence Act 1990.

There is a small Office of the Head of Veterans' Affairs. This team provide advisory and administrative support to the

Head of Veterans' Affairs, manages our finances and reporting, and provides a secretariat to the veterans' boards and panels.

Marti Eller, Deputy Head of Veterans' Affairs

Marti is the Deputy Head of Veterans' Affairs and also leads the Business Services, Policy, and Decisions and Entitlements teams.

Michelle Williams, Manager Veterans' Services

Michelle leads our Veterans' Services teams.

Elaine Myers-Davies, Manager Projects & Communications

Elaine leads the Projects and Communications team.

Jo Elworthy, Principal Advisor to the Head of Veterans' Affairs

Jo is the Principal Advisor to the Head of Veterans' Affairs.

Our teams

Our organisation consists of three main areas:

- Veterans' Services
- Business Services, Policy, Decisions and Entitlements
- Projects and Communications

There is also a small Office of the Head of Veterans' Affairs.

Veterans' Services

This area is headed by Michelle Williams, Manager Veterans' Services. It manages the support we provide to veterans and their families.

- Our enquiry line team support our day-to-day communication channels such as a phone, email, and social media channels.
- Our case management teams work with our clients and their families.
- Our rehabilitation team are specialists who provide advice and support on more complex cases.

Business Services, Policy, Decisions and Entitlements

This area is headed by Marti Eller, Deputy Head of Veterans' Affairs. It includes:

- Business Support, including payments, cemeteries, and contracting
- policy development
- Ministerial servicing and support
- Decisions and Entitlements.

Projects and Communications

This area is headed by Elaine Myers-Davies, Manager Projects & Communications. It includes:

- projects of significance, such as commemorations
- engagement and communications.

Office of the Head of Veterans' Affairs

Office of the Head of Veterans' Affairs

This area includes:

- advisory and administrative support to the Head of Veterans' Affairs
- finance and reporting
- a secretariat to the veterans' boards and panels.

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