



THE BOSUN'S CALL

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ONCE NAVY, ALWAYS NAVY



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The federal government has dropped its plan to cap veterans' allied health payments at \$5,000 a year. Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh announced the reversal on 17 September 2026. The cap was due to start in July 2027 and would have limited how much the Department of Veterans' Affairs paid each year for services like physiotherapy and other allied health care. It was brought in to save money, but it quickly drew criticism from veterans' advocacy groups, the Coalition, the Greens and crossbench MPs. They argued it would make it harder for veterans to get ongoing treatment they need.

After consulting with the veteran community, the government backed down. Keogh said "anyone who pulls on our nation's uniform to serve deserves nothing less." Opposition Leader Angus Taylor welcomed the decision as "great news for veterans," adding that "veterans shouldn't have to fight for their healthcare." The government hasn't said whether any other measure will take the cap's place.



THE CAP ON VETERANS' HEALTH

HAS BEEN SCRAPPED

The federal government has dropped its plan to cap veterans' allied health payments at \$5,000 a year. Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh announced the reversal on 17 September 2026, ending months of pressure from the veteran community and politicians across the parliament.

A budget saving that angered veterans

The cap was announced in the 2026–27 federal budget and was due to start on 1 July 2027. It would have limited what the Department of Veterans' Affairs paid each year for a Veteran Card holder's allied health care. That included physiotherapy, psychology, chiropractic, podiatry, occupational therapy, exercise physiology, dietetics and speech therapy.

The measure was expected to save more than \$779 million over four years. The government argued that only about one in 10 cardholders spent more than \$5,000 a year. It said the cap would help stop over-servicing, a problem flagged by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Veterans with a valid clinical need could have applied for funding above the limit, but DVA never finalised how that would work.

A campaign that crossed party lines

The backlash came quickly. Veterans' groups, including Fair Care for Veterans and the Families of Veterans Guild, said a flat dollar limit was a blunt tool. They warned it would hit veterans with complex, long-term injuries hardest. A Change.org petition urged the government to honour the Veterans' Covenant.

In parliament, the Coalition, the Greens and the crossbench all opposed the cap. Independent Tasmanian senator Jacqui Lambie called it a "callous disregard for veterans' health". She and Greens senator David Shoebridge then passed legislation through the Senate to block any future cap on veterans' health payments.

Opposition defence spokesman Phillip Thompson also campaigned against the measure. Some doctors said the planned fee increase for providers would simply mean veterans hit the cap after fewer visits.

"We heard, and we have responded"

Keogh said the government had committed to listening to ex-service organisations, veterans and their families. "We heard, and we have responded," he said. "Anyone who pulls on our nation's uniform to serve deserves nothing less."

The government also reversed a separate cut to travel allowances for families of deceased veterans. Fair Care for Veterans spokesman John Armfield said, "This is what happens when a government listens to veterans." Opposition Leader Angus Taylor called it "great news for veterans", adding that "veterans shouldn't have to fight for their healthcare".

What happens next

Instead of the cap, the government will rely on measures to improve access to allied health, including higher fees for the practitioners who treat veterans. The budget set aside \$169.7 million over five years for those fee increases, starting 1 July 2027. DVA had described it as the largest investment in veteran allied health fees in more than 20 years.

Sources

- Controversial health payment cap for veterans scrapped – InDaily (AAP)
- Controversial health payment cap for veterans scrapped – The Canberra Times
- Veterans salute Labor retreat on health payment limits – inkl
- 2026–27 Federal Budget: new measures for health providers – DVA
- What the \$5000 DVA allied health cap means for GPs – The Medical Republic
- A cap on allied health is blunt and poor policy – Families of Veterans Guild



The Bicentennial Naval Review:

Sydney Harbour, 1 October 1988

On Saturday 1 October 1988, more than 50 warships from 16 nations lay at anchor in Sydney Harbour as the Duke and Duchess of York reviewed them from the deck of HMAS Cook. An estimated two million people lined the foreshores to watch.

The International Bicentennial Fleet Review, formally the Bicentennial Naval Salute, was one of the largest peacetime gatherings of warships ever seen in Australian waters. It brought the navies of Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific together to mark 200 years since the arrival of the First Fleet.

Two anniversaries in one

The review marked two milestones at once. Nationally, 1988 was the Bicentenary of European settlement, dating from the First Fleet's arrival at Sydney Cove in January 1788.

For the Navy, it was also the 75th anniversary of the first entry of the Royal Australian Navy fleet into Sydney Harbour. On 4 October 1913, the new fleet unit led by the battlecruiser HMAS Australia steamed through the Heads, a public sign that Australia now had a navy of its own.

The review sat within a week of naval celebrations running from 28 September to 3 October 1988. It came just two years after the RAN's 75th anniversary review of 1986, when Prince Philip reviewed a fleet led by the American battleship USS Missouri.

The fleet

Fifty-four ships took part, with Australia supplying the largest contingent and the US battleship USS New Jersey leading the visiting fleet. Nigeria sent personnel rather than a ship, bringing the total to 16 nations (Naval Historical Society of Australia).

Nation	Ships	Flag
Australia	20	
United Kingdom	6	
United States	4	
Netherlands	4	
France	3	
Japan	3	
New Zealand	3	
Malaysia	2	
Pakistan	2	
Papua New Guinea	2	
Greece	1	
India	1	
Italy	1	
Solomon Islands	1	
Vanuatu	1	
Nigeria	Personnel only	

The mix was striking: Cold War heavyweights anchored alongside patrol boats from Pacific neighbours that had only recently gained independence. The presence of New Jersey, a recommissioned Second World War battleship, drew particular attention from the crowds.



The review

The Duke and Duchess of York, Prince Andrew and Sarah, embarked in HMAS Cook to steam past the lines of anchored ships. Prince Andrew was himself a serving Royal Navy officer and Falklands War helicopter pilot, which gave the occasion a sailor's touch.

The choice of reviewing ship was unusual. Cook was not a warship but an oceanographic research vessel, commissioned in 1980 with a crew of about 150 and room for 13 civilian scientists (HMAS Cook). She had already served as reviewing ship for Prince Philip in 1986. As Cook passed, ships' companies manned the rails in the naval tradition. The review was followed by a Royal Australian Air Force flypast joined by visiting aircraft and Qantas airliners, and the day closed with fireworks over the harbour.

Two million on the foreshores

An estimated two million people watched the review, more than half of Sydney's population at the time. Spectators gathered along the harbour's headlands, parks and foreshores to see the lines of grey hulls and the royal couple pass.

For many Sydneysiders it was the closest they would ever come to a foreign warship. The review became one of the defining public moments of the Bicentennial year, alongside the tall ships re-enactment on Australia Day.

Legacy

The 1988 review set the benchmark for later Sydney fleet reviews. Its closest successor was the International Fleet Review of 3–11 October 2013, marking the centenary of the 1913 fleet entry. About 40 warships and 16 tall ships took part, led by HMAS Sydney, and Governor-General Quentin Bryce and Prince Harry conducted the review on 5 October (International Fleet Review 2013).

Cook herself paid off on 31 October 1990, two years after her moment in the spotlight. The image of a research ship carrying royalty past the world's navies remains a distinctive chapter in Australian naval history.

Sources

- Australian Naval History on 1 October 1988, Naval Historical Society of Australia
- Royal Australian Navy: Fleet Reviews over the Years, Naval Historical Society of Australia
- HMAS Cook, Wikipedia
- International Fleet Review 2013, Wikipedia

SYDNEY'S SONAR SEES ALL

The image on the sonar screen in HMAS Sydney's Combat Information Centre indicated a submarine was below the surface, prompting an immediate reaction.

The operator called through the coordinates to the Principal Warfare Officer, who relayed the information to 'Fenrir', Sydney's embarked MH-60R helicopter that was launched to conduct anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations in the vicinity.

'Fenrir' lowered its dipping sonar, confirmed the position of the submarine and simulated an attack with multiple torpedoes.

This was real-world training in the western Pacific Ocean, in the waters off Guam, between allies and partners.



HMAS Sydney, HMCS Regina and JS Fuyuzuki sail in company during Exercise Pacific Vanguard officer-of-the-watch manoeuvres. Photo: LSIS Lauren Pugsley

Maritime forces from the RAN, Royal Canadian Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, and the US Navy conducted high-end cooperative warfare training in the air, on and below the surface during Exercise Pacific Vanguard.

This was the first ASW serial of the exercise, and Sydney's Combat Information Centre was a darkened den of activity with operators alert at screens all around the room.

ASW advisor PO Tyson Burraston said exercising in real-world conditions was invaluable training for the newer members of the team.

"The opportunity to detect and track submarines using multiple sensors is invaluable for building experience," PO Burraston said.

"It is very challenging to find a submarine, but this exercise enabled us to demonstrate our skills and has been very informative for the whole crew."

Sydney's CO CMDR Hayden Jenkins said Pacific Vanguard enabled Sydney to combine with allies and partners to enhance their shared understanding of capabilities and demonstrate interoperability through high-end maritime warfare training, integrated task group operations and multi-domain cooperation.

"This exercise builds on the working relationships and application of shared procedures that Sydney has enhanced during the ship's regional presence deployment. Sydney's crew has continued to demonstrate their professionalism, warfighting excellence and interoperability," CMDR Jenkins said.

"Australia's presence at this exercise signals to our allies and partners that we remain a reliable and capable security partner that is ready to operate together in a complex maritime environment."



HMAS Sydney in the western Pacific Ocean off the coast of Guam. Photo: LSIS Lauren Pugsley

21 September 2026

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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND FORTIFY NAVAL PARTNERSHIP

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) have reinforced their enduring maritime partnership through the signing of Plan Tasman.

Signed by Deputy Chief of the RAN, Rear Admiral Darren Grogan, and Deputy Chief of the RNZN, Commodore Karl Woodhead, Plan Tasman is designed to strengthen cooperation across personnel, training, capability development, warfighting, engineering, regulation and international engagement.

The agreement will enhance collaboration, information sharing, training, and operational alignment between the two navies, strengthening their ability to operate together in an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific security environment.

Rear Admiral Grogan said Plan Tasman reinforces the longstanding maritime relationship between Australia and New Zealand.

"Plan Tasman builds on generations of cooperation between our navies and provides a practical framework to strengthen the way we train, operate and develop capability together," Rear Admiral Grogan said.

"As close neighbours, trusted partners and allies, this agreement will help ensure our navies remain ready to operate side-by-side and respond to shared challenges in support of regional security, stability and prosperity."

Commodore Woodhead also commented on the strength of the relationship, while highlighting the need to build on the tradition of cooperation to meet the challenges of the current security environment.

"Our maritime relationship was established more than 160 years ago, strengthened over generations in times of both war and peacetime cooperation," Commodore Woodhead said.

"As our region becomes increasingly contested against the backdrop of a deteriorating global security environment, our strategic guidance is to deepen and formalise the alliance. Plan Tasman is exactly that, signalling a shift from a history of cooperation based on tradition to integration by design."

The signing supports both nations' commitment to closer defence relations and a shared vision of increasingly integrated naval cooperation, to support a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.



The Royal Australian Navy and Royal New Zealand Navy have reinforced their enduring maritime partnership through the signing of Plan Tasman. Credit: LSIS Iggy Roberts / Defence



Australian Government

Department of Veterans' Affairs

DVA Contact Numbers

Provider invoicing & billing enquiries: 1300 550 017

Provider enquiries: 1800 550 457

Transport bookings: 1800 550 455

Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC): 1800 552 580

Hearing or speech impairment assistance

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service (NRS):

Talk To You (TTY) users phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 838 372

Speak and Listen users phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 1800 838 372

Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for 1800 838 372

Information on health services may be obtained from DVA. The contact numbers for health care pro-viders requiring further information or prior financial authorisation for all States and Territories are listed below:

TELEPHONE: 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

INTERNATIONAL CALLERS: +61 2 6289 1133

POSTAL ADDRESS FOR ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES:

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Health Approvals & Home Care Section

GPO Box 9998

BRISBANE QLD 4001

DVA WEBSITE: <http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/allied-healthprofessionals>

DVA EMAIL: For prior financial authorisation: health.approval@dva.gov.au

The appropriate prior approval request form can be found at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/providers/servicesrequiring-prior-approval>

CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT

For information about claims for payment visit: www.dva.gov.au/providers/how-claim

CLAIM ENQUIRIES: 1300 550 017 (Option 2 Allied Health)

Claims will take a variety of times to complete based on whether or not the claim is prioritised for allocation to a decision maker and the complexity of the claim itself. For example, if the service of the individual crosses two or more Acts or contains a lot of health conditions and injuries or both. This results in some claims being decided faster than the average time, while some claims take longer.

For any condition, to make the claiming process smoother, follow these 3 steps:

- Step 1: Get your medical practitioner to con-firm your diagnosis.
- Step 2: Supply the documents you need to;
- Step 3: Check if you are already eligible for free health care and treatment.

CLAIMS PROGRESS

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) continues to process outstanding claims as quickly as possible, to deliver much needed help to veterans and families sooner.

As part of our commitment to routinely, publicly, and meaningfully reporting on claims processing progress, each month DVA releases updated data via the claims processing page.

A snapshot of May 2026:

DVA received 8,979 claims in May bringing the total for the financial year to date (FYTD) to 98,799 claims – 7.3 per cent higher than the same period last year.

DVA made 7,042 determinations and has finalised 85,573 claims in the FYTD, 8.6% per cent less than the equivalent period last year. 70,344 claims were with an officer for processing, and 31,316 claims were yet to be allocated for processing.

The average time taken to process a MRCA IL claim was 361 days in the 2025-26 FYTD (1 July 2025 to 31 May 2026), compared to 311 days in the corresponding 2024-25 FYTD.

OPEN ARMS

Veterans & Families Counselling

Open Arms provides mental health and wellbeing support to anyone who has served at least one day of continuous fulltime service in the ADF and their immediate families.

1800 011 046



**SAFE ZONE
SUPPORT**

Free and anonymous counselling line for all current and ex-serving ADF personnel, veterans and their families. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

1800 142 072

DEFENCE FAMILY HELPLINE

Available 24/7 or online at www.defence.gov.au/members-families/defence-helpline.asp. Staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

1800 628 036

DEFENCE ALL HOURS SUPPORT LINE

24/7 confidential telephone service for Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families to facilitate access to ADF or civilian mental health services.

1800 628 036