



PUBLIC STATEMENT

Veterans Deserve Leadership They Can Trust

The Engadine RSL sub-Branch has consistently approached concerns regarding veterans' healthcare as a matter of evidence, policy and veteran wellbeing, not party politics.

We have welcomed decisions by the Australian Government when they have benefited veterans. Equally, we have raised concerns respectfully and directly when we believed decisions could adversely affect those who have served.

Recent events involving the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Matt Keogh MP, have caused us to consider a more fundamental issue: leadership and trust.

Veterans travelled to Canberra seeking to raise legitimate concerns directly with the Minister responsible for their portfolio. The Minister initially declined to meet with them and subsequently acknowledged that decision was wrong.

There are differing accounts of aspects of the meeting that eventually occurred. We will not present disputed allegations as established fact. Our concern goes beyond the events of one meeting.

Trust is fundamental to leadership.

For veterans, that principle carries weight. Military service requires people to place extraordinary trust in their leaders, their mates and the institutions they serve. Leadership carries responsibility for the people entrusted to your care. That responsibility does not disappear when decisions become difficult or when those affected disagree with you.

Those who serve in the Australian Defence Force understand that leadership carries obligations.

We are taught to lead by example, to seek and accept responsibility, to know and care for our people, to make sound and timely decisions, and to communicate effectively, including by listening.

We are also expected to demonstrate the values of Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity and Excellence.

These are not standards that should apply only to those who wear a uniform.

It is reasonable for serving members, veterans and their families to expect comparable standards of leadership from the Minister entrusted with responsibility for veterans' affairs.

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"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance"

A Minister does not need every veteran to agree with every Government decision. Nor should disagreement with Government policy be confused with a failure of leadership.

But veterans must have confidence that their Minister will listen to them, treat them with dignity and respect, demonstrate empathy, accept responsibility when mistakes occur and act to rebuild trust when it has been damaged.

Leadership does not mean never making mistakes.

When mistakes are made, leadership requires the courage to acknowledge them. When people lose confidence in their leaders, leadership requires listening and accepting responsibility. When trust has been damaged, leadership requires meaningful action to restore it.

In our assessment, that trust has been lost.

More importantly, we have not seen the leadership necessary to restore it.

This position is not based on political allegiance.

We would apply the same standard to any Minister for Veterans' Affairs, regardless of which political party formed Government.

Our concerns regarding the proposed \$5,000 DVA allied health threshold remain, particularly around how veterans requiring treatment above the threshold will maintain continuity of care. We acknowledge Government assurances that clinically necessary treatment above the threshold will continue to be funded and welcome the additional information that has subsequently been provided.

We will continue advocating on those concerns through the appropriate consultation processes.

However, this statement is no longer principally about a disagreement over policy.

It is about leadership and trust.

Australia has recently completed a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. At a time when rebuilding trust, listening to lived experience and improving the systems supporting serving and former ADF members should be paramount, confidence in the leadership of the Veterans' Affairs portfolio is essential.

The Veterans' Affairs portfolio cannot be effectively led without the trust and confidence of the community it exists to serve.

In our assessment, the Minister has lost that confidence and has not demonstrated that he can restore it.

For that reason, the Engadine RSL sub-Branch Executive Committee believes the position of the Hon Matt Keogh MP as Minister for Veterans' Affairs is no longer tenable and calls on him to resign from the portfolio.

Who subsequently holds that office is a matter for the Prime Minister.

Our expectation will remain the same regardless of who occupies it. Veterans and their families deserve a Minister who listens to them, respects them, accepts the responsibilities of the office and can command their trust and confidence.

Veterans deserve certainty.

Veterans deserve to be heard.

Leadership requires both.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BRAD", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Brad Copelin
President

28 August 2026