

VETERANS ARE NOT JUST FOR ANZAC DAY, SO LET'S LOOK AFTER THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED NATION

STATES MUST STEP UP AND DO THEIR PART TO LOOK AFTER OUR DEFENCE VETERANS, WRITES JOHN HARDY

When many people think of Anzac Day, they probably think of World War I, possibly a beach landing onto Anzac Cove, great hardship under Turkish guns or a withdrawal under darkness planned with Australian flair and cunning. A history that lies just beyond living memory, stories from our forefathers that generate national pride and bring a nation together. For a moment in time, we stand, we reflect, and we give thanks. As I prepared to commemorate my second Anzac Day as the chief executive of RSL Tasmania yesterday, I wanted to share some thoughts on the meaning of Anzac and the state of care for veterans and their families in Tasmania.

My story centres around a brief chat with a veteran we helped house, which involved a joint effort between RSL Tasmania and our friends at The Salvation Army. His words will never leave me, "John, veterans are not just for Anzac Day". This veteran is among the hundreds of veterans and their families we have helped in 2022 and 2023.

The more we look, the more we find. And as long as RSL Tasmania exists, we will never stop looking.

For many veterans, there is a feeling that some public figures may use Anzac Day and their local cenotaph as a media opportunity. A chance to show the public that they fully support veterans, only to state when it really matters, "the care of veterans is predominately a federal issue".

If you believe that veterans aren't a local state concern, then thankfully you live in a world where suicide and homelessness have never affected you, because veterans walk amongst us all. Veterans are intertwined in our communities. When people look across the crowds on Anzac Day, they will notice the medals dotted amongst them and realise that veterans are everywhere. Can they really be pushed so conveniently into a federal responsibility box whenever it suits, after all, veterans are 178 per cent more likely to be homeless than the general population, and female veterans are 127 per cent more likely to suicide. This is everyone's concern, and, like our Anzacs, everyone needs, to step up. Surely, due to the tsunami trauma affect these issues have on our communities it has to be just as an important issue at state level as it is at the federal level.

Veterans that return from conflicts have only asked for two things – we must honour and commemorate the dead, but we must fight like hell for the living. RSL Tasmania is very much in that fight. There is constant pressure on our staff because if we get it wrong, a community could lose a veteran.

With financial support from RSL Queensland and local support from many others, we are slowly making a difference by housing more veterans, employing more veterans and giving much greater welfare support to veterans and their families in need. You can show your support by following the story of our veterans across our social media (RSL Tasmania | Facebook, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/rsltasmania>, RSL Tasmania) and by supporting our community based events.

As you read about or watched yesterday's parades and marches on the nightly news or reflected on how you stood in silent reflection this year on Anzac Day, I'd like to ask one thing; let's fight like hell for the living ... our veteran is 100 per cent right, veterans are not just for Anzac Day, and neither are we.

John Hardy is the chief executive of RSL Tasmania.