



# AVCAT

AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'  
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST



# Annual Report 2025

Transforming lives through education



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*Scholars at the 2025 Victorian presentation ceremony L-R: Isabella Schneiders, RSL Victoria; Noah Codey, Commando Welfare Trust; Matthew Thompson, Long Tan Bursary; Anniek Hartney, Long Tan Bursary; Molly Fredericks, Long Tan Bursary; Nathan Sawan, Legacy Education Fund; Gabrielle Hannan, Long Tan Bursary; Sam Desira, RSL Australia; Hannah Hawkins, Long Tan Bursary; Jeremy Firman, Long Tan Bursary.*



**AVCAT**

AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'  
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

# Introduction

**In 2025, AVCAT continues its proud commitment to supporting the next generation of scholars from Australian veteran families.**

Our mission remains clear: to expand access to tertiary education by providing vital financial assistance to the children and grandchildren of those who have served our nation.

Demand for support remains strong, reinforcing both the importance and impact of our work. We are deeply grateful to our longstanding sponsors whose ongoing commitment makes these scholarships possible, and we warmly welcome the new partners who have joined us in our mission. Together, we are creating life-changing opportunities for students who may otherwise face significant barriers to higher education.

This Annual Report reflects on the progress achieved over the past year – the growth in our scholarship program, the resilience and accomplishments of our scholars, and the tangible difference our sponsors' generosity continues to make. Each scholarship represents more than financial assistance; it is an investment in potential, aspiration, and the enduring legacy of service and sacrifice within veteran families.

While we are proud of the milestones reached this year, our focus remains firmly on the future. There are still many deserving students seeking support, and we are committed to extending our reach so that more young people can pursue their educational goals with confidence.

We look forward to another year of empowering students, honouring service, and building brighter futures together.

Len Russell  
CEO AVCAT

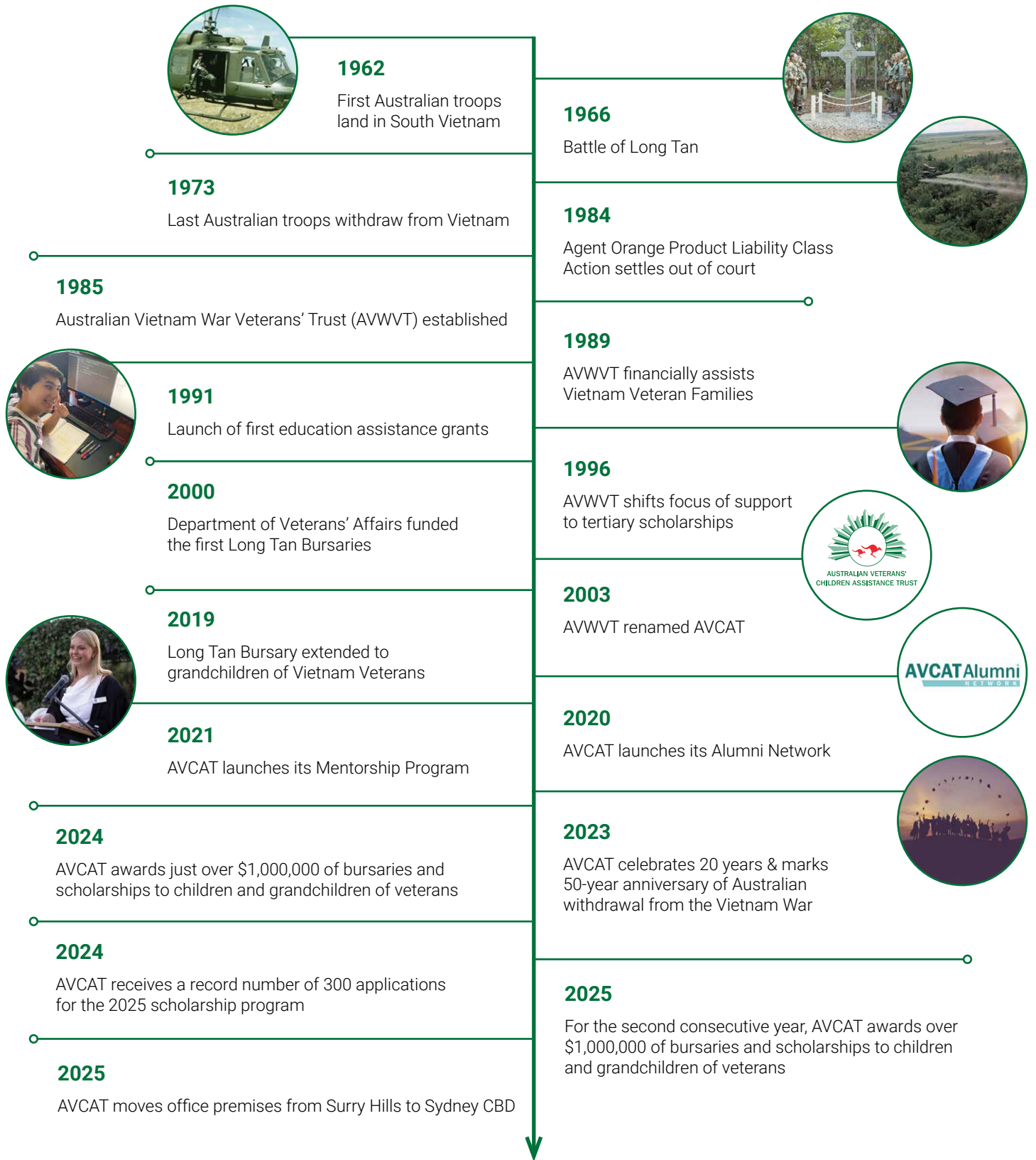


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**“ If there is anything I can tell others, it is to take the risk, take the opportunity, and give things a go! When an opportunity presents itself, don't shut the door immediately. I promise life has a wonderful way of surprising you, and with the support of AVCAT, you will feel unstoppable in your educational adventure. ”**

**Madison Gallaway**  
2021 RSL Queensland Scholar

# Timeline



# Board

## Chair



**Major General Bill Crews  
AO (Retd)**  
Chair of the Board since 2017

## Deputy Chair



**Lieutenant Colonel Ian M  
Henderson (Retd)**  
Board Director since 2005  
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans  
Association of Australia | Member of the  
Finance Audit and Risk Committee

## Company Secretary



**Mr Len Russell**  
Appointed 22 February 2021

## Board Directors



**Mr Gordon S Blake**  
Board Director since 2012  
Appointed by Australian  
Veterans' and Defence Services  
Council | Member of the  
National Selection Committee



**Ms Queen Dunbar**  
Board Director since 2025  
Appointed by Australian War  
Widows Inc.



**Squadron Leader Eric C  
Easterbrook OAM (RAAF  
Retd)**  
Board Director since 2020  
Appointed by Legacy Australia



**Mrs Meg Green AM RN  
RM MN**  
Board Director since 2025  
Appointed by Defence Force  
Welfare Association | Member  
of the Finance Audit & Risk  
Committee. Previous Board  
Director 2018 – 2024



**Mrs Robynne Mitchell**  
Board Director 2024 - 2025  
Appointed by Australian War  
Widows Inc.



**Mr William (Bill) Roberts  
OAM**  
Board Director since 2005  
Appointed by Vietnam  
Veterans, Peacekeepers and  
Peacemakers Association  
of Australia | Member of the  
National Selection Committee



**Lieutenant Colonel Les  
Bienkiewicz (Retd)**  
Alternate Board Director  
since 2025  
Appointed by Defence Force  
Welfare Association



**Ms Emily Cook**  
Alternate Board Director  
since 2025  
Appointed by Australian War  
Widows Inc.



**Mr Richard Cranna OAM**  
Alternate Board Director  
2021- 2025  
Appointed by Legacy Australia  
Member of the Finance Audit  
and Risk Committee



**Mrs Jenny Gregory OAM**  
Alternate Board Director  
2018 - 2025  
Appointed by Australian War  
Widows Inc.



**Ms Kate Hazelton**  
Alternate Board Director  
since 2025  
Appointed by Legacy Australia



**Mr Peter Jones**  
Alternate Board Director  
since 2018  
Appointed by Australian  
Veterans and Defence Services  
Council | Chair of the Finance  
Audit and Risk Committee



**Mr Peter Kainerder**  
Alternate Board Director  
since 2006  
Appointed by Vietnam  
Veterans, Peacekeepers and  
Peacemakers Association  
of Australia | Member of the  
National Selection Committee



**Mr Mick Bainbridge LLB,  
BComm, GDLP, GAICD**  
Alternate Board Director  
2023 - 2025  
Appointed by RSL Australia



**Dr Robert Webster OAM  
FCPA**  
Alternate Board Member since  
2025  
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans  
Association of Australia  
Member of the Finance Audit  
and Risk Committee  
Previous Board Director 2017  
- 2025

# CEO's Report

**2025 was another significant year for AVCAT as we continued to achieve important milestones in support of tertiary education for the children and grandchildren of veterans.**

We again disbursed over \$1m in bursary and scholarship payments to the children and grandchildren of veterans who are in necessitous and/or deserving circumstances as well as moved our staff from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) building in Surry Hills, Sydney into modest office accommodation behind the Queen Victoria Building in the Sydney central business district. We are also maintaining our scholarship completion rate above 80%, now at a rate of 83%, averaged across five years.

## Value of financial support given to scholars

This year AVCAT again exceeded payments to scholars in excess of \$1m in total for both Long Tan Bursaries, supported by Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Sponsored Scholarships, supported by many ex-service organisations, corporate and individual donors.

Over these past 22 years, since 2003, AVCAT has disbursed

over \$15m in total of Long Tan Bursaries (50%) and Sponsored Scholarships (50%). It must be said that this achievement rides on the back of the long-term financial support from DVA, enabling AVCAT to easily replicate the Long Tan Bursary processes and procedures to enable the Sponsored Scholarships, supported by ESOs, to flourish.

## Positive impact

AVCAT received a record 300 applications from August through October 2024 for bursaries and scholarships commencing in 2025. With the generous support of our sponsors, in 2025 AVCAT awarded 86 new three-year scholarships and twelve (12) scholarship extensions for a fourth year of study support. AVCAT is very thankful to our sponsors who recognise that some degrees now take 4 or 5 years to complete and need this additional support. This brought the total number of bursaries and scholarships supported in 2025 across Australia to 280.

AVCAT has now awarded more than 3,210 bursaries and scholarships, assisting thousands of veteran families with the cost of tertiary education.

It needs to be noted that each year AVCAT provides scholarship funding for about 40% of those



who apply. We continue to seek additional sponsors for new scholarships to close this gap. As a good start to closing this gap in 2025 we have successfully entered partnerships with six new sponsors, adding six new scholarships for 2026.

## AVCAT bursaries and scholarships

AVCAT is a national independent charity registered with the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

Long Tan Bursaries and Sponsored Scholarships provide up to three years of financial support to students studying tertiary courses in Australian universities, TAFE, and registered training organisations (RTO). (see page 18 for the 2025 scholarship recipients listing).

Len Russell, CEO of AVCAT, speaking at the 2025 NSW/ACT presentation ceremony



# NSW/ACT SCHOLARSHIP PRESENTATION CEREMONY 2025



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

## AVCAT Sponsors

DVA continues to be a strong and generous supporter of AVCAT. They provide funding for 37 new Long Tan Bursaries each year and essential administrative funding to support staffing and other office administration costs. DVA has supported over 1,000 bursaries since creating the Long Tan Bursary in 2000. Their support for core costs enables AVCAT to continue to assist the wider veteran community with around 50 to 60 new sponsored scholarships each year.

I would specifically like to acknowledge the support of Minister for Veterans Affairs, Hon Matt Keogh; the Secretary of DVA, Ms Alison Frame; the Deputy Commissioners across each state and territory; the Repatriation Commissioner, Mr Kahlil Fegan; the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, Ms Annabelle Wilson, and their staff.

Another strong supporter of AVCAT scholarships is the Queensland State Branch of the RSL. Over the past nine years,

since 2017, RSL QLD has funded more than 190 scholarships.

Long term sponsors such as Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Veterans' Association of NSW (TPI NSW), Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Veterans' Association of SA (TPI SA), Legacy Australia and Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers & Peacemakers Association (VVPPAA) are to be recognised, each providing over 15 years of support to scholars through AVCAT.

AVCAT continues to play a pivotal role in enabling our sponsors to fulfill their missions within the veteran community.

## AVCAT additional support program

The AVCAT Alumni Mentorship Program is now in its fifth year. Seven scholars benefitted from the wisdom and experience of their alumni mentors. Each mentor completed a training course prior to assisting their allocated mentee in the nine-month program. AVCAT is very grateful to the RSL &

Services Clubs Association NSW who financially supported this program through their Veterans Benevolent Fund this year.

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank our dedicated team here at AVCAT. We know that we fill an important need within the veteran community, reducing the financial and emotional burden for the children and grandchildren of veterans struggling to obtain tertiary qualifications.

I want to also acknowledge the work of the independent assessors and sincerely thank the volunteer members of the National Selection Committee for their commitment and detailed and fair assessments of applications.

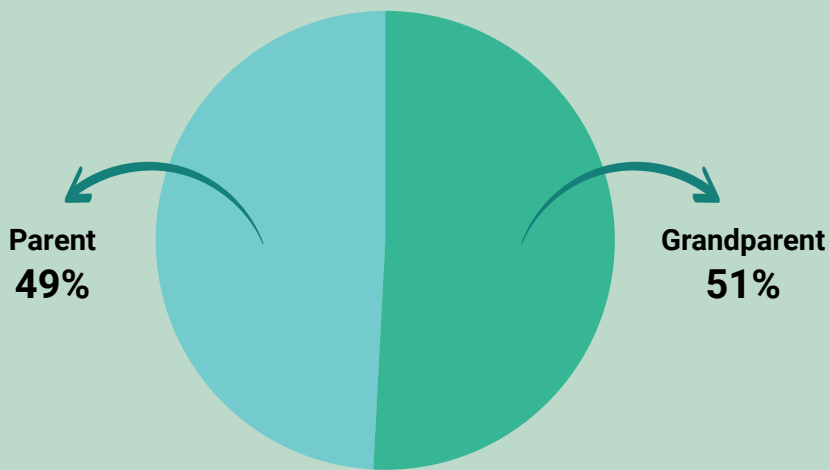
Finally, I acknowledge and sincerely thank the Chair of AVCAT, Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd), for his support of me throughout the year as well as the volunteer Board of Directors for their time and service to AVCAT.

**Len Russell**  
Chief Executive Officer

# 2025 Scholar Snapshot

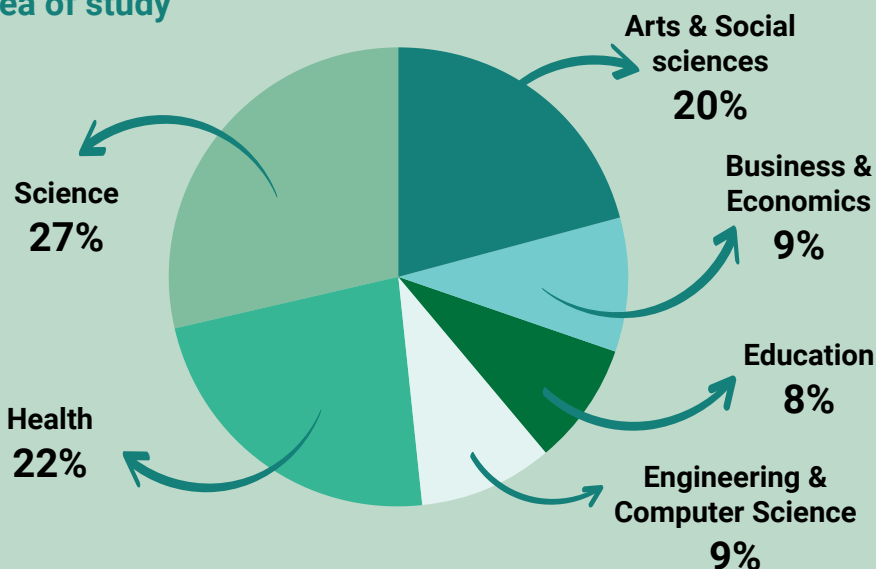


## Relationship to Veteran



Service Branch of Veteran	
Army	67%
Navy	18%
RAAF	15%

## Area of study

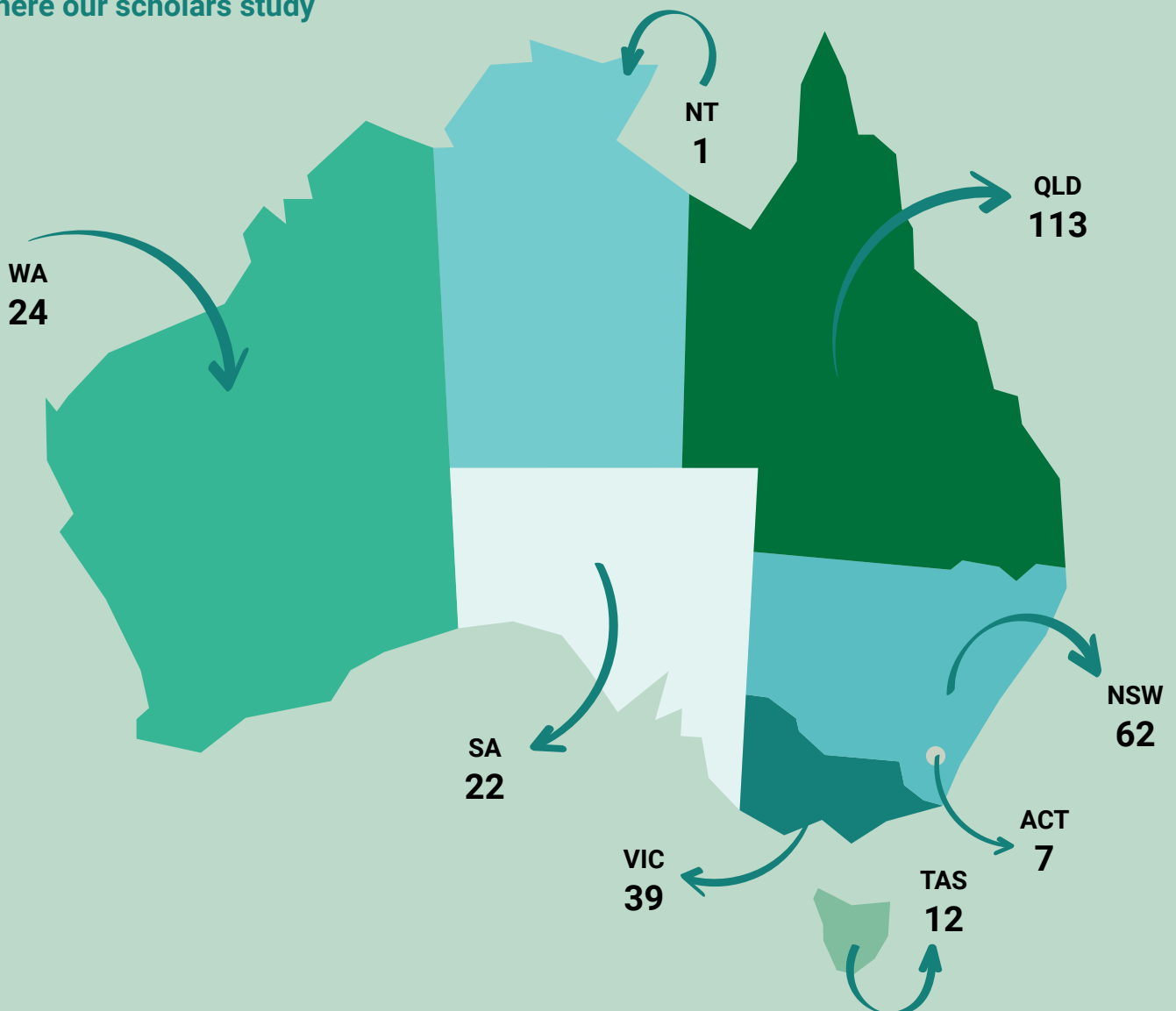


Level of Study	
Certificate/Diploma	11%
Undergraduate	79%
Postgraduate	10%

“ Thank you again for standing by me. Your support inspires me to put my best foot forward as I build the skills necessary to serve Australia’s future, whether that be in supporting defence capabilities or addressing economic challenges like housing affordability. ”

**Jeremy Firman**  
2025 Long Tan Bursary scholar

### Where our scholars study



# Chair's Report

**2025 was a year which saw our small and dedicated staff team relocate to leased premises in Market Street in Sydney, having been required to vacate the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) building in Surry Hills. This has been done in conjunction with our success in securing the new contract for delivering the services we were initially established to provide some 22 years ago.**

AVCAT and its predecessor have had a distinguished period of service in support of the children of veterans. From the earliest beginnings in 1985, as the Australian Vietnam War Veterans' Trust, we have consistently maintained our focus on providing financial support to the children, and more recently, grandchildren of Australian Veterans. This was primarily to allow them to reach their academic potential, in all cases in the knowledge that this may not be possible without the additional support that we are able to provide. Our criteria for selection have also remained broadly consistent; academic potential, being in necessitous circumstance, and deservedness.

Our core business remains the administration of the Long Tan Bursaries for the children and grandchildren of veterans of the Vietnam Conflict, on behalf of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). The new Services

of Agreement, following tendering in 2024, has an effective life of only two and one-half years with options for two extensions of one year. Reflecting on the considerable time and cost of tendering, we are hopeful that we can not only see out the full life of this contract but have it renewed in due course.

Despite our representations, the DVA Tender made no provision for ongoing support to our highly successful scholarship program. Some adjustments in staffing arrangements and a modest increase in the administrative fees for managing sponsored scholarships, have allowed us to continue providing this highly valued service to the children and grandchildren of veterans beyond those from Vietnam.

For the 2025 cohort year we were fortunate to be able to again present 37 new Long Tan Bursaries. However, eligible and deserving applicants continue to exceed this number (with 180 of the total of 300 applicants being children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans). In addition, 49 new sponsored scholarships were presented which allowed us to assist many others worthy of support, justifying the contribution made by our increasing number of scholarship sponsors. This means that we are still not able to support all who are worthy of assistance. As of February 2025, there were 280 bursary and scholarship



*Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd)*

**“ The scholarship gives me the luxury of not having to stress about covering rent each week. I hope you know that you have been able to play a fundamental role in the success of my studies. ”**

**Claire Little**  
2025 Shepherd  
Scholarship scholar



*2025 RSL Queensland presentation ceremony L-R: Seth Wright, 2025 RSL Queensland scholar; Wendy Taylor, State Deputy President of RSL Queensland; Len Russell, AVCAT CEO*

recipients supported to undertake tertiary study.

It was at the initiative of the initial AVCAT Board in 2003 that the complementary scholarship program was established. Its purpose was largely to meet the demand for educational support from the children of veterans from conflicts other than Vietnam. These scholarships are sponsored by Ex-Service Organisations, corporations, and other private donors. Efforts have continued to expand this program, and since 2017, the Queensland State Branch of the RSL has been the strongest supporter offering more than 190 scholarships over the past nine years. We greatly value the confidence which all our scholarship sponsors place

in us to manage the selection of suitable recipients and support them through their studies. We continue to seek particularly donors who can assist us in ensuring that there is equitable access to these scholarships across Australia, noting that many scholarships are confined to the geographic area of the sponsor.

We in AVCAT are blessed with a highly professional and dedicated staff team under our Chief Executive Officer, Len Russell. They are all committed, experienced and, importantly, caring people who bring to bear their professional qualifications and lived experience. The Board and I record our collective appreciation for their efforts and support. While reluctant to single out

individuals, I must record that the growth in the number of sponsors supporting us can be attributed largely to the negotiating skills of our Scholarships Manager, Robyn Richardson.

Recognising the close link between the academic and career success of veteran children and the veteran's and his/her family's mental health and wellbeing, we continue to argue that the funding support to the scholarship program should be covered in part under DVA's broader responsibilities. In the light of the findings of the recent Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, such support to family members of veterans is seen as a significant and worthy contribution. It is noteworthy that our scholars continue to achieve

*2025 Victorian presentation ceremony L-R: Jennifer Redman, scholar guest; Sam Desira, 2025 RSL Australia scholar; Mark Schroffel, State President, RSL Victoria*

completion rates for their education well in excess of the general university population.

The pursuit of good governance and financial stewardship under the guidelines of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC), is the least expected of us by our sponsors and donors. Our Audit Reports and related guidance have ensured that we are fulfilling this important responsibility. Further, the Directors of AVCAT use the materials available to not-for-profit organisations on the ACNC website and from the Australian Institute of Company Directors to complement their continuing professional development. Our Auditor, James Winter of Grant Thornton, continues to be particularly helpful in ensuring that our accounting practices are up to date, and we comply fully with ACNC requirements. I pay tribute here to our Finance Manager, Chris Wicks, for his diligence in managing our finances. We have confirmed that our insurance policies continue to cover both staff working from home, and cyber threats. Appropriate steps have been taken to secure personal information and conduct regular data back-ups. Our broad policy guidance covers all aspects of management appropriate to our size, turnover, and responsibilities.

As I have mentioned previously, our funding situation remains quite tenuous. While our Alumni



Program is expanding gradually, and, pleasingly, alumni are now financially supporting a scholarship, 2025 was the final year in which the RSL and Services Clubs Association in NSW was able to support our Mentorship Program.

This year saw some changes in Board Membership and the addition of the Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) as a Member of the Trust. DFWA have been strong supporters of our work over several years and we considered it appropriate to invite them to accept membership, with consequent opportunity to appoint a Director and Alternate Director.

I extend my appreciation for the time and commitment of my fellow Board Directors; and sincerely thank our wider group of volunteers who serve on or support the work of the National Selection

Committee and the Finance, Audit, and Risk Committee. Without these combined voluntary efforts, we could not deliver on our commitments to the Veteran Community, dependants, and those who provide all of the financial support on which we depend.

We continue to value the support which DVA has offered in promoting and supporting the Long Tan Bursaries, and the direct support which several staff have offered us in pursuing our mission, and hosting presentation events. The new Services of Agreement with DVA marks a slight departure from the strong and effective partnership we've had with DVA for the past 22 years. We remain committed to collaborating with DVA and emphasise the importance of our shared goals to deliver programs that enhance

the wellbeing of veterans and their families.

All of us in AVCAT are humbled to see the impressive achievements of so many of our bursary and scholarship holders whose family circumstances would otherwise have limited their opportunities. We record and publish several of the testimonials and letters of appreciation we receive from students following completion of their courses, and we all reflect on the value they have placed on their award, and their gratitude for the support they have received.

Those family members whom we are fortunate to meet also comment on how they have gained enormously from seeing their child or grandchild making their way in life with the benefit of an education they may not have been able to offer them. These are all people who join us in truly believing that education transforms lives. It is our privilege to be able to assist in some small way.

**Major General  
W. J. Crews AO (Retd)**  
Chair



*2020 RSL Queensland scholar, AVCAT alumni and 2025 mentor, Grace Sholl, guest speaker at the RSL Queensland 2025 presentation ceremony*

*2025 Western Australia presentation ceremony L-R: Samantha Patuto, DVA Deputy Commissioner WA; Steve Stoll, Legacy WA President; Joshua Moxey, Legacy Australia scholar; Ashton Smith, Long Tan Bursary scholar; The Hon Matt Keogh MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs/ Minister for Defence Personnel; Bethany Doyle, Long Tan Bursary scholar; Bryn Matthews, Long Tan Bursary scholar; Len Russell, AVCAT CEO.*



# AVCAT Alumni

## NETWORK

**The AVCAT Alumni Network (AAN) promotes the connection AVCAT Alumni have with each other and current AVCAT scholars in a unique community of children and grandchildren of Australian Veterans.**

### AAN Mentorship Program

Through the generous support of The Veterans Benevolent Fund, the charitable arm of the RSL & Services Clubs Association, the AVCAT Alumni Mentorship Program has run successfully for 3 consecutive years since 2023.

In 2025, seven dedicated alumni generously volunteered their time to serve as mentors to current AVCAT scholars. Mentors undergo training and ongoing coaching throughout the program. This provides the support needed for mentors to engage with their mentees in a meaningful and impactful way. This is highlighted in the feedback from a 2025 mentor "I discovered the effectiveness of following a structured process and what that provided. I learnt there was a formula that could be mastered for mentoring."

AVCAT would like to thank The Veterans Benevolent Fund for their support from 2023 to 2025 inclusive. The program will continue in 2026 through internal AVCAT funding as we continue to seek sponsorship.

**VETERANS**  
**BENEVOLENT FUND**  
RSL & SERVICES CLUBS ASSOCIATION

Laura Banks, a 2012 Alumni, has been a mentor since the program began in 2023. Here she writes about her experience with the program.

### **Building Futures Beyond Scholarships: The AVCAT Mentorship Program**

Since its inception in 2023, I've had the privilege of being part of the Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) Alumni Network Mentorship Program, a meaningful extension of AVCAT's scholarship support. The program connects current scholarship recipients (mentees) with experienced alumni and professionals (mentors), creating a network that helps guide students through study, career planning, and personal development.

While scholarships provide critical financial support, the Mentorship Program offers something just as valuable - guidance, connection, and confidence. For mentees, many of whom are the first in their family to attend university, having someone to talk to who understands the challenges of navigating higher education and early career choices can be transformative. They not only gain guidance, but reassurance and encouragement that they have someone in their corner and that they can succeed.

As a mentor, it's been incredibly rewarding to see mentees grow in confidence, take steps toward their goals, and overcome obstacles with a little support and a lot of determination. The experience has also given me personal and professional rewards, a deeper connection to those in the veteran community, new perspectives from mentees, and the satisfaction of giving back in a meaningful way.

The Mentorship Program is a valuable part of the broader support offered by AVCAT. It bridges the gap between financial assistance and real-world support, making a lasting difference in the lives of the children and grandchildren of our veterans. My grandfather was a proud serving member of the Army, it is a privilege to honour him in this way, and I encourage any alumni to support the Mentorship Program.

**Laura Banks**



*Laura Banks, 2012 Legacy Australia scholar, AVCAT Alumni and AVCAT Mentor 2023-2025, speaking at the NSW/ACT presentation ceremony.*

## AAN Scholarship

The AVCAT Alumni Scholarship is a one-year \$5,000 scholarship and has been in place since 2023. Each year we seek to raise funds for next year's scholarship. After our inaugural scholar, Eve Miller, graduated at the start of 2024, the scholarship was awarded to Georgia Maingay in 2025. Georgia is studying a Bachelor of Primary Education in Tasmania and is grateful for the past Alumni of AVCAT for providing her with this scholarship opportunity. In her application Georgia mentioned that education is a passion of hers and her "goal is to foster a love for learning in my future students and encourage them to pursue their dreams, no matter how challenging the journey may be."

We are thankful to our alumni that we have once again been able to secure the funds from their generous donations to offer Georgia a scholarship.



*Georgia Maingay, 2025 AVCAT Alumni Scholar*

## Alumni Speakers

Each year scholarship presentations are held around the country and remain a highlight for AVCAT, our sponsors and incoming scholars. We remain grateful to have many alumni volunteer their valuable time to come and speak at the presentations. Their individual and unique stories encapsulate the impact of the scholarship and that of the veteran on their journey as expressed by Brooke Denholm, 2018 alum, "This scholarship, while a wonderful opportunity for me personally, represents something much greater. It's a recognition of the sacrifice veterans make, and just as importantly, the sacrifices made by their families."

# Board Director's Report

## Objectives and Performance

### Objectives of AVCAT

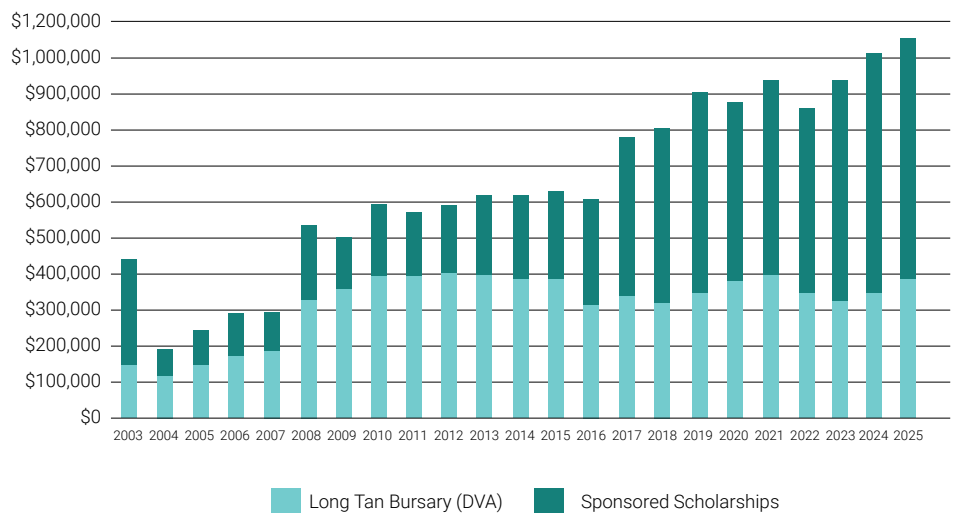
The principal objective of the Company is to provide financial assistance through awarding tertiary education bursaries and scholarships to Australian Veterans' children and grandchildren.

To achieve this main objective, AVCAT obtains funding from the Australian Government Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) for bursaries and organisational administration to maintain the Long Tan Bursary scheme. In addition, private funding for the scholarships and administration of Sponsored Scholarships is funded by Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs), corporate and individual donors.

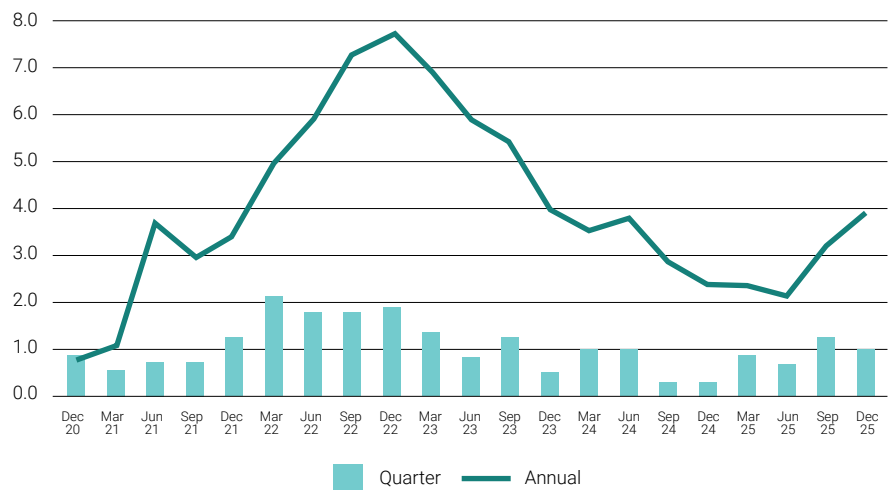
Complimentary objectives are: the provision of a mentorship program utilising past scholars' experience to assist current scholars in their studies, and, once new sponsors are secured, provide financial assistance to veterans who wish to undertake tertiary education.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs supports our organisation in many ways. Through their direct

### Bursary and Sponsored Scholarship Payments



### CPI quarterly and annual movements since Dec 2020



and indirect support of AVCAT, we have been able to award a total of \$15m in bursaries and sponsored scholarships since we commenced as AVCAT back in 2003. This year we continue to achieve remarkable success in awarding just over \$1m in bursaries and scholarships for children and grandchildren of veterans in deserving circumstances.

## AVCAT assists veteran families as the cost of living rises

AVCAT bursaries and scholarships provide the necessary financial support to the children and grandchildren of veterans as the cost of living (as measured by increases in CPI) has continued to trend upwards again to over 3% p.a. and likely to remain so during 2026. The consistent message from our scholars is that without the financial assistance which AVCAT provides, it would be extremely difficult to continue with tertiary education let alone start a course. AVCAT bursaries and scholarships continue to provide the financial security necessary for children and grandchildren of veterans to undertake tertiary education and thereby provide a demographic in necessitous circumstances opportunities they may not otherwise be able to afford.

## Performance Measure

The Company measures performance through the establishment and monitoring of key performance indicators, including:

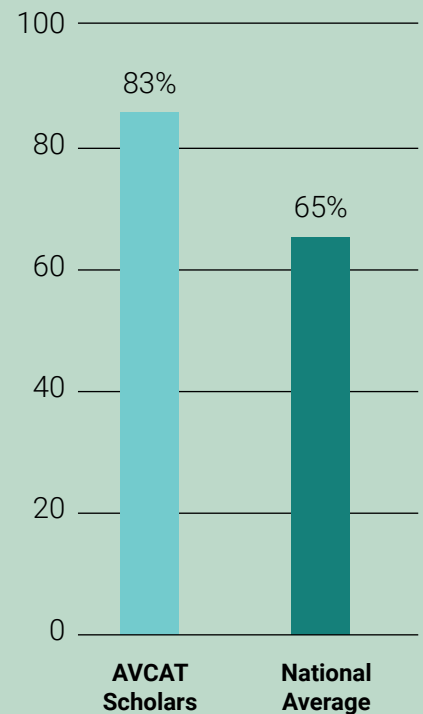
## Scholar Completion Rates

AVCAT's recent analysis of the 2017 – 2021 scholar cohorts revealed that over this five-year period, an average of 83% of our scholars have completed their scholarship, graduated, or are continuing tertiary education. This continues to be far above the national average\* of 65% of tertiary students who complete their tertiary education after six years of study.

(\*Norton, A., Cherastidtham, I., and Mackey, W. (2018), Mapping Australian higher education 2018, p32, Grattan Institute and Australian Government Department of Education and Training).

*2025 RSL Queensland presentation ceremony. RSL Queensland scholar Maggie Livett receiving her award from Wendy Taylor, State Deputy President of RSL Queensland*

## Tertiary Completion Rates



**Ratio of administrative/ fundraising expenses to distributed assistance funds**

The ratio of administrative and fundraising expenses to distributed assistance funds has increased significantly from last year (2025: 22.4% compared with 2024: 13.9%). This sudden increase is due to the inclusion of commercial rent and the costs associated with the moving of the modest AVCAT office in early 2025. This move was initiated by DVA as the complimentary office space within DVA's Sydney office was required for the expansion of DVA services. While sad to leave our home of many decades AVCAT acknowledges the additional financial support DVA have supplied to cover these additional costs.

**Volunteering**

Volunteers remain an important part of ensuring that our organisation keeps costs under control. To support AVCAT, we continue to estimate over 1,200 volunteer hours are made available annually through our individuals on our board, the Finance Audit and Risk Committee assisting with good governance and the

National Selection Committee who review bursary and scholarship applications.

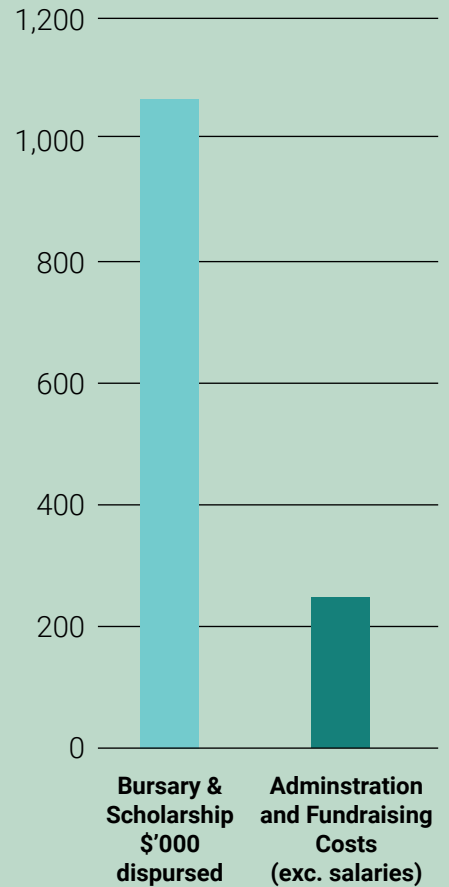
**Directors of the Company**

The Chair is a director and is appointed by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Each of the member organisations appoints a director and each Director may appoint an Alternate with the agreement of their appointing organisation. The appointing organisation pays for the costs associated with their representatives' attendance at meetings.

All the Directors of the Company have experience in matters associated with the support and welfare of veterans and their families in necessitous and deserving circumstances as well as governance experience. The directors and alternate directors act in an honorary capacity and receive no compensation for their services.

AVCAT's Annual Financial Report for year ended 31 December 2025 is available on our website at [www.avcat.org.au](http://www.avcat.org.au).

**Ratio of Administration & Fundraising Expenses to Distributed Scholarships (\$'000) for 2025**



*2025 RSL Queensland scholars with AVCAT CEO Len Russell and RSL Queensland Education & Skills Manager, Jenna Passlow*



# AVCAT SCHOLAR

## Daisy King

Growing up Steve Irwin and David Attenborough were my heroes, I've always felt drawn to protecting our incredible planet and had dreamed of one day being a scientist of some type working within conservation. But never thought I was smart enough to achieve this goal.

Now it's becoming a reality and I'm achieving goals I once only hoped and dreamed of. I'm in my final 5 months of studying Environmental Science majoring in ecology and conservation, and soon I'll be stepping into my career as an ecologist. I hope to work in conservation, doing what I truly love and make a real and positive impact in the world.

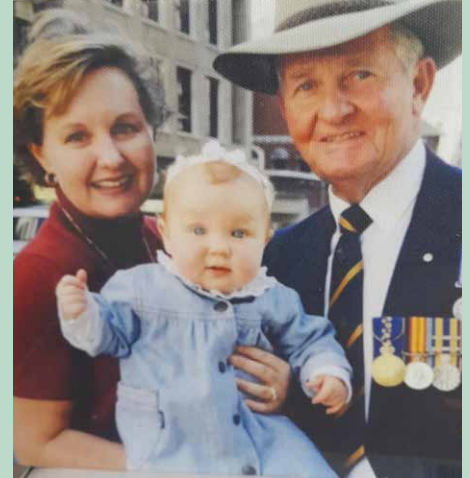
This journey has been difficult to say the least and wouldn't have been possible without the incredible support of AVCAT and my sponsors through the Long Tan Bursary, I can't thank you enough. I'm grateful that my grandfather and veteran Raymond Maclean encouraged me



to apply for a scholarship through AVCAT and believed in me chasing my dream of studying. We have a very close relationship, and he's always said to me, "at some point in life you need to work hard to achieve the life you want Tuppence, so head down tail up for a while and it'll all be worth it" (Tuppence is the nickname he's called me since I was a baby). I feel lucky to have a wonderful and supportive relationship with my grandfather and look up to him. He has achieved a lot in his many years and has instilled hard working and family values in me.

Living out of home while studying full-time is tough, especially when you're trying to stay financially afloat in a cost-of-living crisis. The bursary has taken a huge weight off my shoulders and has helped me with affording rent, textbooks, transport, and all the everyday costs that come with university life. It's allowed me to focus on my studies, take on valuable internships and volunteer work, and dedicate myself to achieving my degree, which is shaping my future.

**“ I'm grateful that my grandfather and Veteran, Raymond Maclean encouraged me to apply for a scholarship through AVCAT and believed in me chasing my dream of studying. ”**



*Daisy with her mum and grandfather*

As someone who's neurodivergent and has overcome significant challenges growing up, this bursary has meant more than just financial relief, it's been a foundation for my stability, self-belief, and growth.

Thanks to the amazing generosity of my sponsors and the support from AVCAT, I've been able to bring my dream career to life. More importantly, I've found the confidence to turn my passion into something real and believe in myself and my ability. I've proven that you really can do anything you put your mind to and work hard for.

I'm deeply grateful for your faith in students like me. Your support over the last 3 years has helped me turn my goals into reality and I hope to give back to the environment and the community in the same meaningful way you've given to me.

**Daisy King was awarded a 2023 Long Tan Bursary**

# 2025 Scholarship Recipients

## Long Tan Bursary



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Sienna Adams  
Sarah Blackman  
Rebecca Brown  
Louis Brown  
Louis Brown  
Damon Burgess  
Molly Croft  
Khoa Do  
Bethany Doyle  
Emma Egan  
Jeremy Firman  
Raleigh Riko Fitzgerald  
Seth Fitzgerald  
Molly Fredericks  
Katie Gould  
Evie Hammat  
Gabrielle Hannan  
Anniek Hartney  
Hannah Hawkins  
Lily Homer  
Alisha Hopf  
Kira Hughes  
Connor Jones  
Finn Love  
Bryn Matthews  
Emily Morley  
Brigid Murnane  
Jess Nipperess  
Cameron Pavey  
Charlotte Pearce  
Brad Pertini  
Ava Record  
Jackson Ryan  
Ashton Smith  
Jack Sydes  
Matthew Thompson  
Charles Tricker  
Kobi Weiss

## RSL Queensland Scholarship



Ella Beckwith  
Ashleigh Benson  
Finn Cohen  
Jacqueline Cook  
Sara Cox  
Taryn Cox  
Cameron Heap  
Cody Jackson  
Emily Jones  
Maggie Livett  
Harrison Lewis  
Piper Miller  
Josie Morris  
Ellis Pearson  
Sam Roberts  
Kerryn Scottney-Turbill  
Tanika Sloane  
Sarah Watson  
Jemma Wirth  
Seth Wright

## Legacy Education Fund Scholarship



Joshua Moxey  
Nathan Sawan

## TPI New South Wales Scholarship



Bridie Simpkin  
Emma Wilson  
Andrew Yates

## RSL Australia Scholarship



Sam Desira

## RSL Australia Captain Reg Saunders MBE Scholarship



Isobel Fuller  
Arabella Gainsford

## TPI South Australia Scholarship



Hannah Colligan  
Angus Hislop



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AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'  
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

## AVCAT Alumni Scholarship



Georgia Maingay

## AVCAT RAAF Women's Association Educational Patriotic Fund Scholarship

Madison Martin

## Bravery Trust Scholarship



SUPPORTING THOSE WHO SERVE

Claire Mitchell

## Commando Welfare Trust Scholarship



Noah Codey  
Finley Dowd  
Kaylee Schroeder

## Defence Force Welfare Association



## Warren Brash Memorial Scholarship

Ella Wainman

## Downer Defence Australian Veterans' Family Scholarship



Maxwell Marchant  
Kaylee Ryan  
Jess Tresidder

## RSL Victoria Scholarship



Isabella Schneiders

## Shepherd Scholarship

Claire Little  
Caroline Newman

## Tasmania Naval Network Scholarship



Oliver Winn

## The 480 Fund for the TLE Scholarship

Lachlan Beck  
Nicole Moran  
Poppy Starr

## Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Far North Coast (NSW) Scholarship



Neeve Maguire

## Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia



## Graham Walker AM Scholarship

Charles Adams



*Katie Gould  
2025 Long Tan Bursary scholar*



*Sam Roberts  
2025 RSL Queensland scholar*



*Jemma Wirth  
2025 RSL Queensland scholar*

## AVCAT SCHOLAR

# Elizabeth McMahon

I can finally say that I am a newly graduated doctor! Becoming a doctor has been the most challenging yet rewarding experience of my life – something I will carry with me forever. The privilege of standing here today is entirely because of the support of AVCAT and Chatswood RSL Club.

Throughout my entire studies, I have been backed by these incredible people. Without them, I simply would not be here. I grew up in a small town where becoming a doctor felt like a distant, almost impossible dream. My father served for 27 years in the air force and my mother served as intelligence in the air force. Their determination, strength and grit have always inspired me. The



ongoing relationship my family has had with the RSL introduced me to AVCAT, a group that went on to stay with me for my entire graduate and post graduate journey.

When you come from a small town and face the challenge of getting into and studying medicine, having people who truly believe in you becomes the foundation on which success is built. That support has meant everything to me.

I am incredibly proud to say that I have spent the last seven years writing letters and staying connected with AVCAT and my sponsor, Chatswood RSL Club. I hope they can see the growth, confidence, and deep gratitude that has developed over this time.

I am currently working in a small regional town and have come away with a strong passion for rural medicine and mental health. Growing up around military families, veteran mental health has always held a special place in my heart. The doctors I have encountered in this space have been nothing short of exceptional.

Moving forward, my greatest desire is to give back to rural communities and to care for our veterans. While I don't yet know exactly what form this will take – and I know I still have much to learn – I will never forget who helped get me here. You have been the foundation that allowed me to achieve my dreams.



*Elizabeth on her first day as a doctor*

**“ You have been the foundation that allowed me to achieve my dreams. ”**

**Elizabeth McMahon was awarded a 2019 Chatswood RSL Club Scholarship**

# Sponsors



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs



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RSL  
Australia



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TPI South Australia



NSW Branch



Joondalup City RSL Sub-Branch



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VAA Victoria

**Major Donors**  
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Mrs Edna Collins  
Dr Peter Helson  
Mr Graeme Morris  
Mr Chris Morris  
Shepherd Scholarship

# Staff & Volunteers

## Staff

Chief Executive Officer

**Len Russell**

Finance Manager

**Chris Wicks**

Scholarships Manager

**Robyn Richardson**

Project Manager

**Tania Hayes**

Scholarships  
Administration Officer

**Jessica Nguyen**

IT and Finance Support

**Raji Fernando**

## Volunteers

National Selection  
Committee Chair

**Karen Blackwell**

National Selection  
Committee Members

**Tony Best**

**Gordon Blake**

**Bronwyn Burr**

**Robyn Campbell**

**David Errington**

**Major Eileen Henderson OAM  
RFD (Retd)**

**Peter Kainerder**

**William (Bill) Roberts OAM**

**Carly Marshall**

## Auditor

Company Auditor

**Mr James Winter**  
**Grant Thornton Australia Limited**



*“ Being the first point of contact at AVCAT means I’m often there at the very beginning of a scholar’s journey – answering questions, listening to their concerns, and helping them feel confident about what comes next. I’m proud to support the children and grandchildren of Australian veterans by making the scholarship process clear, welcoming, and respectful. It’s truly inspiring to see how far our scholars can go with a strong support network behind them. ”*

**Jessica Nguyen**

Scholarship Administration  
Officer

# AVCAT Graduates 2025



Rebecca Brown, 2025 Long Tan Bursary scholar



Daisy King, 2023 Long Tan Bursary scholar



Olivia Lotz, 2022 Long Tan Bursary scholar



Aiyahna Browning, 2022 RSL Queensland scholar



Casey Aherne, 2024 RSL Queensland scholar



Elizabeth McMahon, 2019 RSL Chatswood Club scholar



Jeanelle Agar, 2023 Long Tan Bursary scholar



Chadwick Oehlman, 2022 RSL Queensland scholar



Nicholas Lord, 2023 TLC scholar



Thomas Gleeson, 2023 Long Tan Bursary scholar



Erin Eagles, 2024 VVPPAA scholar



Riley Anderson, 2023 Long Tan Bursary scholar

# Into The Future

As we look ahead, AVCAT is aware of the ever-evolving environment in which our scholars' study. Rising living costs, changing education pathways, varied modes of learning and increasing demand for support reinforce the importance of accessible, sustainable scholarship programs. In response, we are positioning AVCAT not only to meet today's needs, but to remain strong and adaptable in the years ahead.

**Our future direction centres on three strategic priorities:**

## Sustainable growth

We are committed to expanding scholarship opportunities in a measured and responsible way. By strengthening long-term partnerships and diversifying funding sources, we aim to provide certainty – for our organisation and, most importantly, for the students who rely on us. A key focus for the coming years is broadening our geographic reach, particularly in the Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania, where we see opportunity to grow sponsorship and increase scholarship availability. We are committed to ensuring that eligible students, regardless of where they live, have equitable access to support.

## Stronger connections

AVCAT is more than a scholarship provider; it is a community. We will continue building meaningful engagement with scholars, alumni, sponsors and the broader veteran community. By sharing stories of impact and fostering ongoing relationships, we strengthen the network that underpins our mission.

## Capability and excellence

Continuous improvement remains essential. Investing in our governance, systems and people ensures we operate efficiently, transparently and with the highest standards of accountability. This enables us to maximise every dollar entrusted to us and deliver the greatest possible benefit to our scholars.

Looking forward, our purpose and strategy remains clear: to honour the service and sacrifice of Australian veterans by empowering their children and grandchildren through education.



*William Buttigieg, 2024 War Widows Queensland scholar*



*Sarah Ancombe, 2023 Veteran Benevolent Fund scholar*



*Bella Taylor, 2024 Defense Force Welfare Association scholar*

**“ Legacy Australia is proud to partner with AVCAT, whose invaluable work empowers veterans’ families through education and opportunity. What sets AVCAT apart is its comprehensive approach – identifying, vetting, recommending, and tracking the progress of AVCAT scholars that Legacy Australia proudly sponsors each year. Our ongoing commitment extends to both scholars currently in the program and the continuation of new scholarships, ensuring continued support for veterans’ families through education.**

**AVCAT’s contribution is invaluable, and Legacy Australia remains dedicated to this partnership by maintaining representation on the AVCAT Board. Together, Legacy Australia and AVCAT continue to expand opportunities for the families of veterans, ensuring their futures are brighter and more secure. ”**

**Graham Boyd**  
Chief Executive Officer  
**Legacy Australia**  
Sponsor since 2008



**AVCAT**

AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'  
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

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