

## Old soldiers' homes are fading away

By ESTHER HARWARD

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Auckland's only care home for former soldiers is going into battle as numbers of older veterans decline and costs increase.

Most of the ex-servicemen at the 128-bed Ranfurly Veterans Home and Hospital in Three Kings fought in World War II and are in their 80s. The likelihood that there could be none left in another decade has prompted radical plans to expand services.

The Ranfurly Trust Board is investigating the possibility of creating the country's first "centre of excellence" for post-traumatic stress that could provide professional counselling and foster academic research into the condition.

The board is looking at whether the service could be made available to anyone dealing with the psychological after-effects of a violent incident, such as a robbery, a rape, or the murder of a loved one.

Management committee chairman Graeme McKay says the home will always prioritise people who have put on a uniform to serve their country but it has to adapt to ensure it stays open.

He says people coming to terms with any horrific incident can go through a similar experience to those involved in battle.

People suffering shock are often referred to community run counselling programmes, and these are not always readily available or thorough enough, he says.

"Mostly it's being delivered by volunteers who don't necessarily have clinical training."

Other proposals include providing out-patient care for people in their own homes, and setting up a retirement village for independent veterans and their dependents.

Bob Storey, the home's chief executive, says financial pressures are also pushing expansion plans.

Like many elderly residential providers across the country, some of which are getting out of the business, the home finds district health board funding is not keeping pace with inflation and operating costs.

"The contract price that we get from government is less than what it costs to provide the type of care we believe residents need," Mr Storey says.

But Ranfurly Home is luckier than most. It sits on a fully paid-up 2.8 hectare section and is currently using just a third of the land.

Built in 1903 to care for veterans from the Crimean War, Indian Mutiny and Land Wars, its backers are determined to achieve another centennial.