

Veterans' issues — from pensions to prescriptions

Promises, promises — and their fate

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number of reviews of aged and community care which includes the Aged Care Funding Instrument review due in September. In addition, increased funding in the 2009–10 Budget will bring direct financial support for aged and community care providers who care for older Australians to a record level of \$44 billion.

Provide zero real interest loans for aged-care facilities

On 17 September, announcement of the first stage of the Australian Government's \$300 million two-part election commitment to provide funding for aged-care beds where they were previously unlikely to be established.

Hold an annual Veterans' Health Week — continuing

The first Veterans' Health Week is proposed to be held in August 2009 with the theme "Physical Activity".

Extend the Income Support Supplement to widows without dependents

Payment of the supplement to widows without dependents commenced in July 2008.

This involved the abolition of the age restriction on the payment.

Vietnam Veterans' Family Study

A consultative forum to support the study has been established and an Independent Scientific Adviser has been appointed.

At present a short-list of firms to conduct the various parts of the study has been approved and almost all minimum targets for volunteers to be part of the study have been reached.

Extend bereavement payments for single TPI and EDA veterans who die without sufficient assets to pay for a funeral

The extension commenced on 1 July 2008.

Automatic granting of War Widow's Pension to widows of TTI and Intermediate Rate pensioners —

Commenced on 1 July 2008.

Increase financial assistance for Ex-Service Organisations

An additional \$5 million has been provided, with total funding of \$14.9 million to be made available over four years.

Establish the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters

Membership announced 6 September 2008; inaugural meeting 9–10 October 2008.

The Council has now met four times both face-to-face and via video and telephone conferences.

Inquiry into former F-111 Deseal/Reseal workers — continuing

The Inquiry into F-111 Deseal/Reseal personnel and their families has been established.

The final public hearing was held on 17 April 2009 and the committee is now preparing the final report.

Improve the operation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs

Establish an inter-departmental working group to help deal with multiple agencies

A working group has been established and is meeting on a continuing basis. So far the working group has reduced the medical reviews a veteran must undertake, improved information-sharing between departments, published

All politicians make promises. The trick is — as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, acknowledges — how to fulfil them when in power. A first step is to remind people of what was promised and then make an honest assessment of how far they've been implemented. This page contains the continuation of his assessment, which begins on Page 9.

a transition handbook on accessing entitlements across multiple departments and commenced trials improving processes for clients.

These trials include the use of the final Defence medical examination to cover the requirements of a liability claim with DVA or ComSuper and a single claim form that allows claimants to lodge a claim under all three acts the department administers and include all the conditions that they wish to claim on the one form.

Establish a public register of ex-service officials and conduct regular surveys of them

Options are being examined to provide a model for the register that is acceptable to ex-service organisations and the veteran community.

Form a special claims unit

The Special Claims Unit was established in December 2007.

A reduction in the average time taken to process claims under all three pieces of legislation has been achieved.

Examine Military Compensation arrangements — continuing

Funding has been provided in the 2009–10 Budget for a review of military compensation arrangements. Submissions were invited from individuals and organisations.

Submissions closed on 30 June 2009.

Revisit the recommendations of the Clarke Review — continuing

The Government has called for submissions as part of a revisitation of those recommendations of the Clarke Review not acted upon by the previous government.

More than 470 submissions have been received and these are being considered, the majority of submissions concerning the British Commonwealth Occupational Force and participants in the British Nuclear Tests.

Improve the transition management process

Professor David Dunt made five recommendations about transition from the ADF to civilian life procedures, which the Government has accepted. Professor Dunt has also looked at transition arrangements in the Review of Mental Health Care in the ADF and Transition through Discharge.

A further \$83 million has been committed for the implementation of that report.

Establish a DVA hotline to assist ex-service officials

The hotline commenced taking calls nationally in November 2008.

Maintain a separate and properly funded Department of Veterans' Affairs

The 2009–10 Veterans' Affairs Budget provides funding of \$11.8 billion, including \$6.5 billion for compensation and income support, and a record \$4.9 billion for health and health services.

Formation of an Independent Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal

The Tribunal was established on 23 July 2008. The Government has also implemented some of the recommendations of the independent review of the Long Tan gallantry citations. Other outstanding matters are to be considered by the Tribunal.

Provide free Australian flags for families of veterans

After the death of a veteran, his/her family can now receive a free Australian flag from their local MP or Senator.

Declare Battle for Australia Day

The Governor-General has signed the proclamation of Battle for Australia Day, to be held on the first Wednesday in September to pay tribute to the men and women who served in defence of Australia in 1942 and 1943.

Declare Merchant Navy Day

By proclamation Merchant Navy Day will be on 3 September each year, to remember the service and sacrifice of merchant mariners during times of war.

Seek UNESCO Protection for the Kokoda Track — continuing

The Australian Government is committed to preserving the historic values of the Kokoda Track. Through a joint understanding, the Australian Government is giving \$14.9 million to assist the PNG Government protect the Kokoda Track and the Owen Stanley Range. The Australian Government will assist the PNG Government in undertaking a feasibility study for a possible World Heritage nomination of the Kokoda Track/Owen Stanley Range if and when the PNG Government chooses to do so.

Implement Post-Armistice Korean Service Review recommendations — continuing

It was announced on 6 April 2009 that the Government would begin issuing the Australian General Service Medal — Korea from early 2010 as well as the Returned from Active Service Badge to eligible ex-service men and women. Consistent with the recommendations of the review, those who completed 30 days in South Korea during the post-Armistice period, from 28 July 1953 to 19 April 1956, will receive the medals. Further recommendations are still under consideration.

Ballarat Prisoner of War Memorial

Declared as a national memorial on 29 September 2008, \$160,000 to be provided over four years on a one-off basis for maintenance.

Government's implementation update — May 2009

The Government's initiatives beyond its policy commitments outlined since the last election, consist of a series of other initiatives that have been implemented.

Economic Security Strategy Stimulus Package The Government provided \$407 million for more than 325,000 members of the veteran community in the form of one-off bonus payments, commencing December 2008, to assist older Australians and those on low incomes who are the most vulnerable in the current economic crisis.

One-off Senior Australian bonus

A \$500 one-off payment commencing in June 2008, paid in recognition of the contribution older Australians have made to our country and the costs and challenges they face.

Support for carers In June 2008, provided a one-off bonus of up to \$1,600 to carers in the veteran community to assist in managing the increasing cost of living. The Secure and Sustainable Pension reforms, which were announced in the 2009–10 Budget, will provide eligible carers with better financial security by replacing previous one-off bonuses with an annual supplement. Partner service pensioners receiving Carer Allowance will get a basic bonus of \$600, plus \$600 for each person they provide care for.

Household Stimulus Package

One-off bonuses to eligible members of the veteran community including \$900 one-off payments to eligible tax paying veterans and their families, commencing April 2009, as well as one-off education payments to eligible students enrolled in the Veterans' Children Education Scheme, commencing March 2009, as part of the \$42 billion plan.

Commitments to improving mental health Provided \$9.5 million for implementation of recommendations of the Independent Study [of] Suicide in the Ex-service Community and \$83 million for the implementation of recommendations of the Review of Mental Health Care in the ADF and Transition through Discharge.

Review of the structure of the Department of Veterans' Affairs

Completed a review of the structure of the Department to ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of its clients.

Partner Service Pension changes

Aligned qualifying age for Partner Service Pension (PSP) with veteran pension age and ceased payment of PSP to separated spouses.

However, separated partners may continue to receive PSP if they are determined to be in specified circumstances.

Extended repeat prescriptions for the chronically ill

Almost 290,000 veterans, war widows and widowers with chronic health conditions can now get up to 12 months' supply on a single prescription for some medication, reducing the number of times they need to see a doctor just to obtain prescriptions.