



The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc.

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Patron: Mrs. Lynne Cosgrove

5th November 2008

To: - community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

ATTENTION: Senator Claire Moore

Dear Senator Moore

SENATE ENQUIRY 3 NOVEMBER 2008

Lesley Minner and I are of the understanding that the Senate Committee will meet again on Thursday 6 November to further discuss the legislation changes concerning Schedule 2 Partners Service Pension.

As we were only handed the DVA submission during proceedings on Monday, there were points raised by the department representatives that we had not had the opportunity to see prior to us speaking to the committee and we felt that some answers given by Mr. Farrelly and Mr Telford could have been expressed in a clearer manner.

"Separated due to Illness" was an area that most certainly was not explained clearly. As it stands now the veteran and the partner still have to have a 'marriage-like relationship' and in many cases this cannot happen if the wife wishes to remain safe. Most of these women live separately to their veteran, there are no intertwined financial arrangements, yet in quite a few cases these wives still support the veteran emotionally, whilst living apart.

We would appreciate if you could read the following letter and distribute it to the rest of the committee as further clarification of some points we felt were very grey.

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Prior to the Labor Government winning the 2007 Election, there was no mention in any election policy that there would be any cuts to the Veteran community. Indeed Labor's Plan for Veterans' Affairs stated that they were committed to "the care of families of veterans in recognition that it is not just veterans themselves who make personal sacrifices to defend our country".

- The explanation given in support of this cut was that it was "in response to broader community expectations". The broader community however did not make any personal sacrifices by any involvement in wars; in fact it is only the Veterans themselves and their wives and families who have made and continue to make any personal sacrifices and continue to pay the price for that war service.
- The original intent of the VEA and subsequent Acts was to ensure that veterans who served their country in times of war would be well cared for by the Australian Government and nowhere is there mention that veteran families affected by war service would be welfare recipients.

Eligibility for Partners Service Pension to be increased from 50 to 58 immediately and incrementally to 60 years unless the partner has dependant children or is the Partner of a TPI, EDA or TTI disability recipient.

- This will impact upon the veteran family. Should the wife of a service pensioner apply to Centrelink for a Carer Payment to care for a veteran with a lesser disability rate than those already mentioned, (up to 100%) then that disability compensation payment will immediately be taken into account as assessable income by Centrelink.
- Consequently the whole veteran family is worse off financially despite assurances that no veteran would be worse off.

Partner Service Pension Cut to legally married but separated wives.

- In a total of 580 separated wives who will be seriously impacted by this legislation, 362 of these wives are married to war veterans suffering from war caused PTSD. These are wives of veterans suffering from war caused mental illness as an accepted disability by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

- The department investigates all compensation claims made by veterans who are sent to independent specialists and if this claim is accepted as relating to their war service, how can that same department then not accept the results of that disability on the marriage of the affected veteran?
- If the separation is as a result of the veteran's war service then the department should accept that this is illness separation at the very least. Marriage is still or should be a respected part of Australian society and these separated wives are still the legal wives of our veterans.
- In many cases the veteran's war service does not end when he/she returns from a theatre of war.
- No allowance has been made for the fact that any of these spouses may have been forced to give up their career and the ability to accrue superannuation, to become a carer for a disabled veteran.
- In fact, no allowance of any kind is made by the Australian Government for the immense savings that the carers of our disabled veterans provide.
- The partners of our war veterans have no standing or recognition at all.
- DVA has a number of programs in place which are designed specifically to deal with the results of PTSD, including programs for the partners of those veterans, so obviously DVA does accept that the behaviour of these veterans has a severe impact on the marriage and family of the veteran.
- It should not be up to the government to make judgements on wives who have either been left or have left themselves.
- This legislation will impact heavily on those wives who are married to Vietnam Veterans, both regular servicemen and conscripted Vietnam veterans, the one group of veterans who were treated so badly during and after they served; yet many remained in the marriage for 30 and 40 years until they could no longer cope or perhaps were traded in on a newer model.
- The effect of service in Vietnam has also prompted the Vietnam Veterans Family study which would give credibility to the fact that being the wife or child of a Vietnam Veteran is somewhat burdened.
- Contrary to the answer given by Mr. Farrelly from the Department on Monday, the VV Family Study is not a study on the effects of a veteran's war service on the health of his partner as opposed to that of his children. It is a documented fact that children of Vietnam Veterans have a 3 times higher rate of suicide than the broader general community.
- These people suffer today. It is the wives and families of Vietnam Veterans, who will be immediately impacted by these changes that the government is proposing to make; as will the veterans who are now serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, the younger veterans.
- These cuts were announced in May 2008 and are proposed to come into effect on January 1 2009, yet the people most affected by this proposed change, were only advised by letter in late September and already we are hearing horror stories.
- P.V.A. was of the understanding that these women would be treated kindly, with respect and humility by one contact person within the DVA, but unfortunately this is not the case.
- On our return home from Canberra yesterday, I received a phone call from an extremely distressed separated spouse who was informed by a DVA officer that unbeknown to her, her veteran husband has a new and improved model whose name was disclosed to the wife; and furthermore she was informed that as this was the case she would now definitely have to apply to Centrelink for income support. I find this extremely cruel.
- Last but not least I believe that the saving to the Dept that was mentioned was quite ludicrous (\$39-40 million). Surely 580 wives who will be moved to Centrelink at a reduction in payment of \$112.80 per fortnight with no pensioner concession card, does not equate to this figure. In actual fact it simply means another government department would now be picking up the bill.
- I believe adding the saving of those spouses who will have to wait until age 58.5 to apply for a Partner service pension could be a major saving for DVA; but I still question how this figure was arrived at.

The PVA implores you to look closely at the ramifications of this bill should it be passed.

Per: 

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