



**VIETNAM VETERANS, PEACEKEEPERS & PEACEMAKERS
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA, (NSW BRANCH) Inc.**

AFFILIATED WITH THE VIETNAM VETERANS FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc.

SUPPORTING ALL WHO SERVE AND HAVE SERVED

THE GOVERNMENT Vs VETERANS IN RECENT TIMES

Over the last few years, the government, the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs have been disappointing.

Indeed it was more than disappointing that the government tried to downgrade the indexation of the TPI Pension, General Rate Pensions, Invalidity Service Pension, Age Service Pension, War Widows Pension, Income Support Supplement, and wholly dependent partner payment.

This downgrading would have, over time, significantly reduced the living standards of disabled war veterans and war widows. It was only resistance in the Senate from the Opposition, Jacqui Lambie and some other cross-benchers that foiled the government's attempt.

The government did, however, succeed in reducing the taper rate of 'asset determined' Part Service Pensions, reducing the pensions of some 10,000 Part Service pensioners and completely cutting out the Service Pensions of some 2,800 others.

In a miserable act, the government withdrew its \$223million share of an agreement with the States to fund Service pensioners' concessions for travel, electricity, phone and council rates.

In another, it has axed the Seniors Supplement (\$876.20 a year) for Gold Card holders not receiving income support.

It has also cancelled the indexation of the Clean Energy Supplement added to Veterans Affairs pensions and payments, causing it to quickly lose real value.

In another mean act, Military Superannuation not previously counted, is now to be counted as income when applying for a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

The government is pausing the indexation of Gold and White card payments to doctors. Previous experience suggests doctors may eventually ration the number of Gold and White card holders they accept for treatment, if not simply not accept DVA patients at all.

And there's more.

The government downgraded the standard of hearing aids issued under SRCA (compensation scheme for peacetime soldiering) citing the criterion of 'medical necessity'. But even some claims including specialists' reports recommending more versatile hearing aids have been rejected. Yet who is better qualified to judge 'medical necessity' than the specialists?

More recently the government has been amalgamating DVA with Centrelink.

- Canberra VAN office was closed and its staff moved to Woden Centrelink.
- Morwell VAN office has been co-located into Centrelink Morwell;
- Ballarat VAN office has been co-located into Centrelink Ballarat;
- Frankston, Gosford, Bairnsdale and Wollongong VAN offices were closed and veterans sent to Centrelink offices.
- Bendigo, Mildura and Warrnambool agency contracts were ended.
- Launceston VVCS closed.
- Newcastle VVCS staff cut.
- Other VVCS offices have been closed and veterans sent to civilian clinics.

Veterans must now join these Centrelink queues before being directed to the DVA staff or being dealt with by Centrelink staff. This attack on the veterans' dignity is in breach of many government promises.

Other disappointments include the government's failure, despite our continuing advice, to acknowledge there may be a barrier of no-guaranteed-child-care for young mums seeking VVCS counselling. Any obstacle to early intervention should be abolished.

It is hard to understand the government's failure to act on the \$9,465 difference between funeral benefits for Vietnam veterans and the more generous benefit for younger veterans. This unfair difference is important for the aging Vietnam veteran community.

It is baffling too, that the government refuses to remove the absurd off-setting between DVA and other completely unrelated Commonwealth payments; its absurdity increased by the fact that, if the unrelated payment is a **State** government payment, there is no off-setting.

Then there is the ridiculously out-of-date life expectancy tables used to calculate DFRB/DFRDB military superannuation payments leaving many superannuants out-of-pocket.