

Younger veterans slow to take on voluntary

Pension Officer and Advocacy work

Our New South Wales branch has been helping well over 1,000 veterans annually, and other ADF personnel apply disability pensions for many years. As well it has guided about 300 a year to appeal DVA rejections of their pension claims.

Those totals are close to doubled when the Australian Capital Territory, South Australian, Queensland and Victorian branches contributions are included.

This work has been done, with some notable exceptions, by volunteer Vietnam veterans.

But in five years from now, nearly all Vietnam veterans will be over 70 years of age and many who are now hard working volunteers will cease their work for one reason or another.

And, of course, other ex-service organisations now relying on Vietnam veteran Pension Officers and Advocates will similarly suffer.

Who will take over the task?

Are there a bunch of younger veterans ready to take our places?

There are certainly plenty of younger veterans' organisations like Soldier On and The Warriors' Return doing good work, but most do not help veterans with their disability compensation claims. With some exceptions, these organisations are interested only in reintegration activities, leaving the 'bread and butter' work of disability pension claims to others.

So when our Vietnam veteran volunteers gracefully withdraw their services there will be, it seems, a dangerous vacuum. The question is, who will fill it? Will DVA be forced to step in and have its officers do what our volunteers now do?

DVA stepping in, would, of course, be disastrous. It is essential that Pension Officers, unequivocally on the veterans' side, help with claims. Indeed, it is frightening to think of how many worthy disabled veterans would have missed out on warranted compensation, had veteran Pension Officers and Advocates not assisted.

It is hoped, before it is too late, that younger veteran volunteers flock to the cause, and become trained Pensions Officers and Advocates.