



NOTES FROM NATIONAL PRESIDENT AND NSW PRESIDENT

TWO OF OUR OWN HONOURED IN FIRST KING CHARLES 111 BIRTHDAY AWARDS

We acknowledge and pass on our fervent congratulations to the following:

Mr John Arnold OAM-Victorian State President. For service to the welfare of veterans.

Mrs Lorraine Burt OAM-Secretary Clarence Valley NSW Sub-Branch.

For service to veterans and their families.

Our National Executive meets in Adelaide and discusses Aged Care with the experts.

Aged Care is unfortunately of concern to all Vietnam veterans, the youngest of us being in our mid 70s.

In June, a team from our National Office in Granville along with State Presidents' teams, gathered in Adelaide for our Annual General Meeting.

Aged Care was dominant among our considerations.

On day one we spent some hours with the CEO of RSL Care, an acknowledged Aged Care expert. On day two we had discussions with DVA Deputy Commissioner, Janice Silby, who, of course, is an expert in the field.

Our conclusion is that, the Aged Care arrangements for veterans, as well as suffering the present dysfunction of the general Aged Care system, has additional unsatisfactory aspects just for us.

It starts like this. When veterans who are under the care of DVA enter Aged Care they become the responsibility of the Department of Health, except for any pension entitlements which remain the responsibility of DVA.

This can create some complexity as the list of DVA entitlements the veteran has been enjoying is not the same as the Department of Health's list.

But more importantly, on entering Aged Care, veterans are not asked to 'tick a box' signifying veteran status, despite the legislation specifying 'veterans' are a group (along with some others) with special needs.

This means that Aged Care homes may not know of the veteran's service so that veterans fail to receive acknowledgement (such as on commemoration days) that the legislation mandates, leaving some feeling unappreciated and isolated.

This failure can go unchecked because DVA has no role in checking to see if veterans are being properly treated. In the past, intending to visit veterans in Aged Care homes to overcome this deficiency, we asked DVA to give us the location of the veterans they knew of. DVA, however, were unable to comply claiming privacy concerns.

How can we improve the system?

1. Identify veterans by 'ticking a box' on entering Aged Care and veterans being asked if they would like veteran visits.
2. Aged Care homes then advises DVA.
3. DVA, in turn, advises ex-service organisations.
4. Ex-service organisation then send welfare representatives to visit.

Also helpful would be an aligning of Department of Health entitlements to DVA entitlements.

But what is vital is that none of us are left isolated and unappreciated in the last years of our lives.

Charging for help with disability pension claims

There is a worrying trend.

Some advocates are advertising their services and charging a fee.

These fees are not small amounts just to cover some expenses, they are substantial fees designed to make handsome profits.

These outfits are charging fees either as a percentage of any payouts or directly. In one case it is 5% of a lump-sum payout or \$250 per claim.

That's a lot of money.

The VVFA has never charged a fee for the help it gives to veterans and war widows submitting disability claims.

There are other ex-service organisations whose help is free and some that charge an acceptable small fee to help cover some costs.

Our free service and that of some other ex-service organisations are backed by years of experience and records of success.

So why would a veteran pay for a service they can get from experienced and successful advocates free elsewhere. I can only think that a lot of veterans do not know about the free services available.

Perhaps members of the military should be given a brochure about the free services on discharge.

50th Anniversary Commemoration of the end of Australia's participation in the Vietnam war.

"The Department of Veterans' Affairs will deliver a televised commemorative service to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial on Anzac Parade, on Friday 18 August 2023.

The commemorative service will be broadcast live across Australia by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and streamed online.'

We have been advocating for an eminent Vietnam veteran such as General Cosgrove or Graham Edwards give the main address but our wishes have been rejected. The rejection was based on 'protocol'.

But protocol is not unchanging or unchangeable. It is subject to common sense.

It amounts to an inflexible, hide-bound DVA unresponsive to those it claims to serve.

What are they trying to hide?

Recommendation 7 of the Suicide Royal Commission interim report is: Provide exemption from parliamentary privilege.

Parliamentary privilege means that the Royal Commission is barred from seeing certain government documents. This means it cannot see how government decisions are made which may be relevant to understanding veteran and ADF suicides.

The Royal Commission says on this issue:

'Despite our clear mandate, parliamentary privilege and public interest immunity claims have seriously, adversely constrained our ability to inquire into and receive the necessary evidence from prior inquiries conducted by and for parliament and to examine government decision-making.'

Is 'parliamentary privilege' being used to unethically hide politicians' doubtful decisions?

A WARNING FOR DVA CLIENTS!!!

Potential DVA clients should be aware that some organisations offering to advise veterans and submit their claims to the DVA are charging their clients for the privilege to do so. We have come across a number of such organisations whose main interests appear to take a sizable slice of any entitlements when equal, or, in our case, more superior services are available free of charge to the veteran.

One example of such organisations which is based in Queensland requires veterans to sign a six- page contract. The contract contains a commitment for the veteran to pay fees for service such as \$1,000 plus GST to submit a Freedom of Information request when the veteran can make the submission him/her self at no cost. An application for a pension increase can be provided by them at the cost to the client of four pension payments. Potentially, this could cost a client up to approx. \$10,000. Payments may also be required for the initial client interview.

Lump sum payments are charged at 5% plus GST. Late payments attract a 10% fee.

This type of organisation is not required to hold formal qualifications to advise our ADF community.

You are obviously aware that our Association provides our services free of charge. Our Compensation and Well-Being staff are formally trained and possess vast experience. For many years we have taken on, on average, six new claimants each day, Monday to Friday 52 weeks per year.