

## **Veterans' Affairs**

# **Saluting Their Service**

**Saluting Their Service** No group of Australians is more deserving of our admiration, gratitude and assistance than those men and women who served our nation at war.

That is why, in Government, the Coalition has worked hard to strengthen veterans' and war widows' security through heightened recognition of their service and improved health and financial assistance. But we should never stop recognising and understanding the greatest of sacrifices these Australians offered to secure our national freedom and way of life

That is why the Coalition, if returned, will boost the commemoration of veterans' heroism and sacrifice, including through a major documentary, "Australians at War" and major commemorative spending at war memorials across the nation and in Gallipoli.

These initiatives will ensure veterans' courage and sacrifice continues to be honoured, especially for younger Australians. This policy underpins the Liberal and National Parties' belief that our history is something to be proud of and celebrated.

# Saluting Their Service

## Table of Contents

**Veterans' Affairs** [\\*](#)

**Executive Summary** [\\*](#)

**Labor's Failures:** [\\*](#)

**The First Howard Government:** [\\*](#)

**A Second Term Howard Government will:** [\\*](#)

**Labor's Record** [\\*](#)

**Highlights of the Government's Achievements** [\\*](#)

**Part 1 The Spirit of Commemoration** [\\*](#)

**Part 2 Australian War Memorial** [\\*](#)

**Part 3 Better Health and Aged Care Services** [\\*](#)

**Part 4 Fairer Pensions and Benefits** [\\*](#)

**Part 5 Maintaining the Repatriation System** [\\*](#)

**Policy** [\\*](#)

**Part 1 The Spirit of Commemoration** [\\*](#)

A Australians at War [\\*](#)

B Regional War Memorials [\\*](#)

C ANZAC Memorial [\\*](#)

D Bomber Command Memorial [\\*](#)

E Pilgrimages [\\*](#)

F The Veteran Commemorative Calendar [\\*](#)

## **Part 2 Australian War Memorial [\\*](#)**

## **Part 3 Better Health and Aged Care Services [\\*](#)**

A New 30% Rebate for Private Health Insurance [\\*](#)

B Vietnam Veterans Health Study [\\*](#)

C Korean Veterans Mortality Study [\\*](#)

D Pharmaceuticals [\\*](#)

E Hospital Services [\\*](#)

F Health Promotion and Preventive Care [\\*](#)

G Veterans in Regional and Remote Australia [\\*](#)

H Ageing with Choice [\\*](#)

## **Part 4 Maintaining the Repatriation System [\\*](#)**

A The Repatriation System [\\*](#)

B Consultation with Veterans' Groups [\\*](#)

C The Claims System [\\*](#)

D The Repatriation Medical Authority [\\*](#)

E Veterans' Review Board [\\*](#)

F Veterans' Entitlement Act Simplification [\\*](#)

## **Part 5 Fairer Pensions and Benefits [\\*](#)**

# Executive Summary

## Labor's Failures:

- **Bureaucratic and inconsistent system of veterans' benefits.**
- **Neglect of Australia's War Memorial.**
- **Health problems suffered by Vietnam veteran and Korean veteran communities ignored.**

## The First Howard Government:

- **Legislated to ensure that our National Flag can only be changed by all of the Australian people at a referendum.**
- **Extended eligibility for the Gold Card to 50,000 World War II Australian Defence Force veterans with qualifying service, aged 70 or over.**
- **Linked service pensions and war widows'/widowers' pensions to 25% of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings in legislation for the first time.**
- **Allocated \$750 million over five years to ensure that veterans receive high quality hospital care.**
- **Expanded eligibility for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card, benefitting 20,000 veterans.**
- **Cut the Defence Service Homes loans interest rate by 1.5 percentage points and capped it at 6.85%.**
- **Completed the Hellfire Pass Museum in Thailand.**
- **Established the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 to recognise post-WWII service with a distinctly Australian medal.**

## A Second Term Howard Government will:

- **Commission a documentary series "Australians at War" for the Centenary of Federation, to promote recognition and understanding of our veterans' achievements and sacrifices during the first century of Federation.**
- **Provide \$11.9 million from the Federation Fund to construct ANZAC Hall at the Australian War Memorial.**
- **Construct a new memorial park to the ANZACs, including a**

- **new site for the Dawn Service, at Gallipoli.**
- **Allocate an additional \$1 million over four years to the Regional War Memorials Programme.**
- **Retain the Veterans' Review Board as an important avenue of appeal for Australia's veterans.**
- **Respond rapidly to the validated findings of the Vietnam Veterans Health Study.**
- **Give priority to the completion of the Korean Veterans Nominal Roll and Mortality Study.**
- **Maintain the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and increase funding for medication awareness programmes.**
- **Continue to provide funds to residential care facilities operated by ex-service organisations that need to upgrade to meet accreditation standards.**
- **Retain the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.**
- **Continue to consult extensively with the ex-service community on all matters of interest and concern to veterans.**
- **Evaluate the Claims Assistance Grants Scheme and Training & Information Programme with a view to implementing new arrangements to ensure veterans are well represented in the appeal system.**

## **Labor's Record**

Labor failed our veterans with its bureaucratic, inadequate and confusing range of services and benefits. Australia cannot afford a return to Labor mismanagement.

- Labor created a system of veterans' benefits that was slow and bureaucratic and riddled with anomalies.
- Labor neglected Australia's national War Memorial, failing to accord it sufficient funding priority.
- Labor failed to provide certainty to Australia's veterans that service and war widows' pensions would automatically keep pace with increases in earning power enjoyed by other sections of the community.
- Labor denied repatriation benefits to many veterans with overseas service in a number of post-World War II conflicts, such as the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan,

the Far East Strategic Reserve and service in Ubon Air Base in Thailand.

- Labor left it to the states and territories to subsidise the cost of veterans' hospital treatment.
- Labor ignored the health problems suffered by the Vietnam veteran community and the need to examine the health of Korean veterans.
- Labor did not allow veterans with Defence Services Homes loans to share in general interest rate reductions.
- Labor ignored the veterans and war widows who live in regional, rural and remote areas. The Howard Government has addressed these failures and introduced a range of new initiatives to improve the benefits and services available to our veterans. A second term Howard Government will introduce further measures to ensure our veterans are recognised for their contribution during Australia's times of national need.

# Highlights of the Government's Achievements

## Part 1 The Spirit of Commemoration

The Coalition has:

- legislated to ensure that our National flag can only be changed by all of the Australian people at a referendum.
- assisted more than 800 communities with local veterans' commemorative activities and projects.
- established two community-based programmes - *Memories and Memorabilia* and *Valuing our Veterans* to preserve memorabilia items and encourage veterans to share their experiences with a wide range of groups in the community.
- provided ANZAC Day school kits to all secondary schools and

- sponsored the National History challenge.
- established Memorial Parks in honour of the Australian Corps at Le Hamel and those who served in the Battle of Fromelles and completed the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum, Thailand.
- provided funding to assist the construction of memorials to Australia's service nurses and those who served in the Korean War.
- placed commemorative plaques recognising the service of veterans of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force.
- undertaken a three-year programme of refurbishing war cemeteries throughout Australia.
- undertaken major structural and security work at the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery in Papua New Guinea and increased security at the Lae War Cemetery.
- supported and promoted the Proclamation by the Governor-General formalising the traditional one minute's silence at 11am on Remembrance Day.
- established the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 to recognise post World War II service with a distinctly Australian medal.
- introduced new clasps for the Australian Service Medal 1945-75 to recognise service in the Far East Strategic Reserve, South West Pacific and Germany following World War II.
- extended eligibility for the 1939-45 Star to include those who were previously ineligible because the war had ceased and to RAAF ground and aircrew who supported aircraft operations in the UK.
- established an End of War List for Vietnam.

## **Part 2 Australian War Memorial**

The Coalition has:

- provided funding for memorials recognising servicewomen, the British Commonwealth Occupation Force and the Merchant Navy, to be constructed in the Australian War Memorial's new Sculpture Garden.
- established an Australian War Memorial travelling exhibition programme, which has so far been seen by more than 145,000 Australians.
- permanently increased the funding base of the Australian War Memorial by \$2 million per annum.
- provided the Memorial with a \$7 million funding injection for

essential building works and \$2.8 million over four years so that entry fees would not need to be introduced.

### **Part 3 Better Health and Aged Care Services**

The Coalition has:

- extended eligibility for the Gold Card to an additional 50,000 veterans who served in World War II with the Australian Forces, are aged 70 or over, and have World War II qualifying service.
- committed \$750 million over five years so that the Department of Veterans' Affairs can directly negotiate high quality, competitive and cost effective hospital care for veterans.
- established a medication management and treatment awareness programme to ensure veterans get the best results from their medications.
- increased allowances paid to veterans travelling for treatment.
- expanded health services in rural areas and provided more mental health counsellors to cover rural areas.
- established more than 25 offices or agencies in regional and rural locations to provide more information to veterans about their health and pension entitlements.
- trialed a falls prevention programme resulting in a substantial reduction in falls in the home.
- amended eligibility for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card so that an additional 20,000 veterans, including self-funded retirees, will soon be eligible.
- completed a Nominal Roll of all Vietnam Veterans, a Mortality Study of Vietnam Veterans, a Mortality Study of National Servicemen who served in the Vietnam War and the Vietnam Veterans Health Study.
- invested \$750,000 in Vietnam veterans' health research.
- established the Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme to improve job prospects for veterans seeking paid employment.

### **Part 4 Fairer Pensions and Benefits**

The Coalition has:

- legislated for the first time to link service pensions and war widows'/widowers' pensions to 25 per cent of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings when Consumer Price Index

increases fail to maintain that level.

- provided an automatic grant of the war widows'/widowers' pension, where the veteran has died of an 'accepted' disability.
- introduced a generous bonus payment for veterans and war widows eligible for age-related pensions if they choose to delay their retirement.
- extended eligibility for compensation benefits, health care and concessional home loans to an extra 10,500 veterans from 12 areas of overseas service.
- provided 10,000 Australian naval personnel from the Vietnam Logistic Support Group with the same "port to port" entitlements as other Vietnam veterans.
- passed on the benefits of lower interest rates to veterans with Defence Service Homes loans by pegging loan rates at 1.5 percentage points below the average market rate and capping rates at 6.85 percent.
- ensured veterans receiving a disability pension through the Department of Veterans' Affairs and age pension through Centrelink can now choose one simple payment through one department - Veterans' Affairs.
- provided eligible veterans who are farmers with a three year 'window of opportunity', to transfer their farm, valued up to \$500,000, to an eligible relative without affecting their access to the age service pension or age Income Support Supplement.

## **Part 5 Maintaining the Repatriation System**

The Coalition has:

- maintained the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- allocated \$1.7 million to assist ex-service organisations to assist with advocacy services.
- retained the Veterans' Review Board as a separate body.
- achieved substantial reductions in the time taken to process compensation claims applications: average processing time in 1997/98 was 72 days, compared with 102 days in 1995-96.

# Policy

## Part 1 The Spirit of Commemoration

Australians, and increasingly younger Australians, warm to commemorative events at local, national and international levels. Awareness of the contribution made by veterans to Australia's heritage has never been higher and the thirst for more knowledge never greater. The Coalition introduced *Their Service - Our Heritage* a four-year programme of commemorative activity culminating with the Centenary of Federation in 2001.

### *A Australians at War*

- The Coalition will commission the production of the documentary series "Australians at War".

The documentary will be produced for the Centenary of Federation on the major wars in which Australian's have participated.

### *B Regional War Memorials*

- The Coalition will allocate an additional \$1 million over four years to the Regional War Memorials Programme.

Approximately 250 communities have already received assistance under the highly successful Regional War Memorials Programme. Increased funding will enable many more communities to restore, renovate or create new memorials as the focus for local commemorative activities.

### *C ANZAC Memorial*

- The Coalition will fund the construction of a new memorial to the ANZACs at Gallipoli.

Gallipoli continues to be a place of pilgrimage for many Australians, particularly around Anzac Day. The Coalition is proposing to build an ANZAC memorial park, including a new site for the Dawn Service, at a place of equal historical significance to the current Ari Burnu cemetery, where considerable damage occurs as a result of crowd

numbers.

This would form a major contribution to the Gallipoli Peace Park initiative of the Turkish Government, which seeks to preserve the military heritage of the peninsular. This initiative will be pursued with the Turkish and New Zealand Governments and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

#### ***D Bomber Command Memorial***

- The Coalition will provide \$100,000 towards the construction of a Memorial to Bomber Command in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial.

The Coalition has honoured its promise to assist with the funding of memorials to Australia's service nurses and servicewomen, veterans of the Korean War and the Merchant Navy. Funding has also been provided for a memorial to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force of Japan.

#### ***E Pilgrimages***

- The Coalition will sponsor pilgrimages to Sandakan and Korea by appropriate and representative veteran groups.

The year 2000 will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commencement of the Korean War and an opportunity to raise awareness of Australia's involvement in the conflict, often regarded as the forgotten war. A new memorial, funded by the Coalition Government, will commemorate those who suffered on the Sandakan to Ranau death march during World War II. Only six Australians out of around 1,800 Australian prisoners survived the march. A pilgrimage is planned for February 1999, to coincide with the opening of the memorial.

#### ***F The Veteran Commemorative Calendar***

- The Coalition will continue to support greater involvement in major days of commemoration, particularly by school children and young Australians.

In particular, the Coalition will continue to promote the community-wide observance of one minute's silence on

Remembrance Day.

The Coalition will also continue to support community recognition of other significant days in the Australian veterans' commemorative calendar, including Anzac Day, Kapyong Day, Long Tan Day and Beersheeba Day. We will also work with veteran organisations in promoting Battle for Australia week, which was commemorated for the first time in 1998.

## **Part 2 Australian War Memorial**

The Australian War Memorial is the focus of the nation's recognition of the contribution and sacrifice of its armed services over nearly 100 years since Federation. It is important to guarantee the role of the Memorial in safeguarding our military heritage and educating all Australians, especially our youth, about the efforts of successive generations of veterans in a wide variety of conflicts.

Reflecting its commitment to restoring this institution to its appropriate standing, the Coalition has over the past two years allocated significant resources to this national treasure, including permanently increasing the Australian War Memorial funding base by \$2 million per annum, injecting \$7 million into essential building works, and providing \$2.8 million to avoid the introduction of entry fees.

- The Coalition will allocate \$11.9 million from the Federation Fund for the construction of ANZAC Hall at the Australian War Memorial.

A significant portion of the Memorial's magnificent collection is stored at the Memorial's annexe in outer Canberra and seen by only a very small proportion of visitors to the main building. The new ANZAC Hall will be sited at the rear of the main building and is scheduled for completion on Anzac Day, 2001.

## **Part 3 Better Health and Aged Care Services**

The Coalition has expanded the health benefits available to veterans and war widows and taken an innovative approach to reducing the risks faced by chronically ill veterans, particularly those who choose to live at home. The Coalition has also focused on the health needs of the veteran community living in rural and remote areas.

### ***A New 30% Rebate for Private Health Insurance***

- The Coalition's Tax Reform Package provides a new non-means tested 30% rebate for the full cost of private health insurance premiums, to replace the current Private Health Insurance Incentive Scheme from 1 January 1999.

All veterans with private health insurance will be able to claim this rebate. For example, a veteran couple paying an annual premium of around \$2,400 will receive a rebate of \$720, compared with a maximum of \$250 under the current scheme.

### ***B Vietnam Veterans Health Study***

- The Coalition will supplement its existing response to the Vietnam Veterans Health Study with a further rapid response when the validated findings are available.

After years of inaction by Labor, the Coalition commissioned a Vietnam Veterans Health Study to survey the health condition of Australia's Vietnam veterans. The study is based on a questionnaire completed by more than 40,000 Vietnam veterans - about 76 per cent of all Australian Vietnam veterans alive today.

The results of the Vietnam Veterans Health Study support the view long held by sections of the ex-service community and accepted by the Federal Government, that the health of Vietnam veterans is generally worse than that of other Australians of a comparable age. The Coalition is very concerned about these findings, and those about veterans' families, including an apparent elevated level of birth defects and suicide rates amongst veterans' children.

Some of the study's results require validation to ensure they are as accurate as possible. This is now underway, after which the Coalition will consider whether additional measures are required through the repatriation system.

The Coalition has already taken a number of steps in relation to the initial findings of the study, including referring the findings to the Repatriation Medical Authority and Australian Defence Force, extending lifestyle courses such as 'heartsafe' and 'gut-busters', and broadening the role of the National Centre For War-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to cover all areas of veterans' mental health.

### ***C Korean Veterans Mortality Study***

- The Coalition will give priority to the completion of the Korean Veterans Nominal Roll and Mortality Study.

Completion of the Korean Veterans Nominal Roll will allow the Mortality Study, a comparison of the mortality of Korean veterans with that of the general community, to get underway.

#### ***D Pharmaceuticals***

- The Coalition will maintain the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and increase funding for medication awareness programmes.

The Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme ensures that eligible veterans and war widows have access to a concessional range of pharmaceutical products in addition to those already available to them through the Pharmaceutical Benefits List.

A pilot programme involving pharmacists and veterans' general practitioners has been extremely successful in reducing the risk of medication misadventure. This programme will be expanded.

#### ***E Hospital Services***

- The Coalition will continue to improve the quality of and access to hospital and health services for veterans and war widows, by implementing the findings of the Review of the Repatriation Private Patient Scheme.

This will be achieved by maintaining a close working relationship with the respective State and Territory Health Authorities to ensure the former Repatriation General Hospitals maintain their veteran focus and that veteran access to other State facilities is continued.

We will also examine the possibility of establishing one or more private sector operations in those States where the former RGHS have been integrated into the State health systems.

The Coalition is also committed to exploring opportunities that offer a level of support to members of the veteran community who fund their own treatment through private health insurance.

#### ***F Health Promotion and Preventive Care***

- The Coalition will implement a range of health promotion and preventive care programmes to link with the National Healthy Ageing Strategy and the International Year of Older Persons in 1999.

The Coalition has honoured its 1996 undertaking to ensure that all programmes and services emphasise health promotion and preventive care. The role of preventive health for the veteran community has expanded significantly, with the establishment of a full strategic approach to preventive health outlined in the "Better Living Plan for the Veteran community".

#### ***G Veterans in Regional and Remote Australia***

- The Coalition will continue to deliver expanded and improved health and information services in rural and regional areas.

In its first term of Government, the Coalition has implemented an ambitious programme of new offices and services in more than 25 regional or rural locations, increased travelling allowances paid to veterans travelling for treatment, expanded podiatry and mental health services and extended the role of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

#### ***H Ageing with Choice***

- The Coalition will give priority to programmes designed to assist elderly veterans who choose to live independently.

These programmes include:

- community support projects and grants programmes to provide supportive social and recreational environments outside the home;
- continuation of the Veterans' Home Maintenance Helpline that links the veteran community to proven home repairs and maintenance tradespeople in their local area;
- in-home respite and support for carers; and
- the introduction of HomeFront - an initiative designed to prevent accidents and falls in the home environment and to provide links to home and community support services.
- The Coalition will continue the focus of the Residential Care Development Scheme on providing funding to residential care facilities operated by ex-service organisations, which need to upgrade facilities to meet accreditation standards by 1 January 2001.

All major ex-service organisations and the Department of Veterans' Affairs are currently engaged in the development of a national ex-service organisation aged care strategy. The National ESO Aged Care Round Table first met on 1 June 1998, and with financial

assistance from the Coalition Government, is working towards a national approach to ensuring facilities and services are available to meet future needs.

## **Part 4 Maintaining the Repatriation System**

1998 marked the eightieth anniversary of the Australian repatriation system. The Coalition has worked to maintain the important traditions and principles of the system which give veterans and war widows confidence in it whilst working with the veteran community to improve the system's responsiveness to their needs.

### ***A The Repatriation System***

- The Coalition will retain the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The Coalition has honoured its 1996 promise to retain both the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). DVA has rightly earned a widespread and genuine respect for its commitment to caring for Australia's 500,000 strong veteran community.

### ***B Consultation with Veterans' Groups***

- The Coalition will continue to consult extensively with the ex-service community on all matters of interest and concern to the veteran community.

To ensure that the repatriation system continues to work in the best interests of the veteran community, the Coalition will continue our extensive programme of consultation with Australia's ex-service organisations through workshops, seminars and regular ministerial meetings.

### ***C The Claims System***

- The Coalition will give high priority to implementing the electronic lodgement of claims, and maintain an ongoing review of the claims system in the pursuit of a fairer, speedier and more efficient system.

Due to the ageing of the veteran community and consequent increasing health needs, record numbers of veterans' compensation and treatment claims are being received by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Significant progress has been made in reducing the

time taken to process compensation claims and applications. In 1996-97, the mean time was 77 days, compared to 102 days in 1995-96. The corresponding figure for 1997-98 was 72 days.

- The Coalition will evaluate the success of the Claims Assistance Grants Scheme and the Training & Information Programme, with a view to implementing new arrangements to ensure veterans are well represented in the appeal system.

The Coalition has successfully implemented a Claims Assistance Grants Scheme to assist ex-service organisations to help veterans and their dependants with their claims and appeals. We will discuss with the veteran community ways to expand this highly successful scheme.

#### ***D The Repatriation Medical Authority***

- The Coalition will implement the findings of the review of the Repatriation Medical Authority.

The Coalition honoured its undertaking to review the operation of the Repatriation Medical Authority and the Specialist Medical Review Council. The review found that the system of using Statements of Principle to determine compensation claims was working well but that the system could be streamlined and improved.

#### ***E Veterans' Review Board***

- The Coalition will retain the Veterans' Review Board as an important avenue of appeal for Australia's veterans.

The Coalition has rejected the recommendations of a review of Australia's system of administrative law, commissioned by the former Labor Government, to abolish the Veterans' Review Board.

#### ***F Veterans' Entitlement Act Simplification***

- The Coalition will continue to simplify the Veterans' Entitlements Act (VEA) and make it available to the veteran community in an easily obtainable form and incorporate into its preamble as far as practicable the principles in the Veterans' Charter promoted by the Australian Veterans' and Defence Services Council.

The Coalition has made a number of amendments to the VEA designed to simplify this legislation, effectively reducing the size of the Act by 80 pages.

## **Part 5 Fairer Pensions and Benefits**

In its first term, the Coalition Government removed significant anomalies in pension eligibility and ensured that the benefits flowing from the Coalition's sound economic management flow through to those on pensions and benefits.

- The Coalition will continue to review and correct anomalies in veterans' benefits that have been of longstanding concern to the veteran community.

Following a review of anomalies in veterans' entitlements in respect of a number of overseas deployments of the Australian Defence Force since World War II, the Government has amended the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) to extend eligibility for disability pension and treatment to about 10,500 additional veterans.