



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

BUDGET ★
2009-10

01

Tuesday 12 May 2009

VETERANS' AFFAIRS PENSIONERS BENEFIT IN RUDD GOVERNMENT BUDGET

Australia's veterans will benefit from the Australian Government's strong commitment to the ex-service community in the 2009-10 Veterans' Affairs Budget.

The 2009–10 Veterans' Affairs Budget provides funding of \$11.8 billion including funding of \$6.5 billion for compensation and income support, and \$4.9 billion for health and health services.

"This is a responsible budget for the veteran community, providing certainty for so many in uncertain economic times, while continuing to deliver our election commitments," Mr Griffin said.

"It builds on the work we have been doing for veterans since 2007, including ongoing improvements in health and mental health services and improving recognition of the courage and sacrifice of our veterans."

Flowing from the Harmer Review of Pensions, the Government will allocate \$1.1 billion over four years to provide extra financial support in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio. Over 320,000 service pensioners and war widow(er)s will benefit from the pension changes.

Single service pensioners and war widows will receive a boost to their pension of up to \$32.49 a week. Service pensioners paid the couples rate will get up to an extra \$10.14 combined a week. These increases are in addition to normal indexation and will apply from 20 September 2009. The current system for the payment of allowances will also be simplified.

An additional \$9.5 million in extra funding has been allocated to boost mental health services for veterans and ex-serving personnel, implementing all of Professor David Dunt's recommendations arising from his *Independent Study into Suicide in the Ex-service Community*. Mental health programs, including suicide prevention, will be strengthened, and administrative procedures faced by those transitioning out of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), or applying for compensation, will be further simplified. More experienced case managers will be assigned to support clients with complex needs and access to mental health clinical expertise will increase.

The Australian Government will provide \$10 million to develop the Western Front Interpretive Trail in partnership with local communities. The project will improve facilities and interpretation at seven sites in France and Belgium where Australians fought during the First World War. Visitors from all nations will be able to trace the course of Australian sacrifices and achievements and learn about Australia's role at these key battlefields.



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

BUDGET ★
2009-10

“As we move towards the centenary of the First World War, the Interpretive Trail is an appropriate way of raising awareness and recognising the contribution of Australians on the Western Front,” Mr Griffin said.

The 2009–10 Budget provides \$1.0 million for a review of military rehabilitation and compensation arrangements, and a review into the cost of pharmaceuticals for war caused disabilities. This funding will help deliver on two election commitments.

Australian veterans and war widows who live overseas will no longer have to maintain an Australian bank account to receive their DVA payments, saving them from paying ongoing fees for international transfers.

Measures will be implemented to improve co-ordination across programs that support veterans and war widows in their homes, to streamline the assessment process, and to enhance service delivery through better identification of veterans' needs. Together with administrative efficiencies, this will result in savings of \$4.2 million over four years.

The Government will spend \$5.3 million in 2009-10 to pay a lump sum to all recipients of the Dependant's Pension. This pension, which has been frozen for more than 45 years, aside from a one-off GST increase in 2000, will be converted to a one-off payment equivalent to three years of payments. New grants of the Dependant's Pension ceased in 1985, and current payments range between 29 cents and \$8.42 a fortnight. This lump sum will be paid to all recipients at the end of September 2009, after which the pension will cease.

The Government will further extend the Defence Services Homes Insurance Scheme to eligible members of the popular Defence Home Ownership Assistance Scheme. This will benefit an estimated 7,500 ADF and Reserve members and is part of the Government's strategy to encourage ADF personnel retention.

During 2009-10, the Government will also complete its consideration of the recommendations of the Clarke Review that were not implemented by the previous Government.

Mr Griffin said the Veterans' Affairs Budget is a demonstration of the Government's understanding of the financial situation that faces veterans and their families and shows a commitment to improving both their circumstances and the system that supports them.

Media inquiries: Minister's Office 6277 7820 or 0437 863 109

The VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week on **1800 011 046**.

To receive the Minister's media releases automatically by **email** subscribe at **minister.dva.gov.au/subscribe.htm**