



The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc.

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Patron: Mrs. Lynne Cosgrove

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To: - community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Further 2008 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2008

The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc (PVA) would like to submit this document to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into provisions of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Further 2008 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2008, concerning Schedule 2- Partner Service Pension.

Under the suggested guidelines PVA would like to put forward observations and opinions based on 10 years of working with the veteran community and the partners of veterans in particular.

The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc is opposed to the proposed legislation which will cut Partners Service Pension 12 months after separation or immediately should either partner begin a new relationship.

PVA questions the morality of such legislation and asks that you do not support this legislation.

In many cases the veteran is suffering from War caused PTSD/mental illness which has been investigated and accepted as a disability by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

The Department has a number of treatment programmes in place in an endeavour to ameliorate the effects of this disability.

Whilst the Department has accepted the responsibility to treat and care for the veteran in these treatment programmes and psychiatric hospitals, it is the spouse and family of any veteran with war caused PTSD who are the ones who have borne the brunt of daily living with the affected veteran.

The proposed legislation makes no allowance for the fact that many of these wives have been forced to give up careers and the ability to accrue superannuation in order to be full time carers of that veteran. For some the cost has been high and for many this cost has been more than they can cope with mentally and physically. Then of course there is the situation where violence is part of the veteran's mental condition.

At the time of separation the wife was entitled to receive a Partners' Service Pension and was more than likely in no mental condition to even consider employment, even had she not lost all her work skills after a number of years out of the workforce caring for a disabled veteran.

A total of 1170 Separated wives receive Partners Service Pension and 420 of these are the Partners of TPI veterans.

DVA has indicated that 590 who are of aged pension age (63 yrs) will be retained by DVA.

The remaining 580 Separated wives are made up as follows:

265 wives are aged between 58.5yrs and 63yrs,

240 wives are aged between 50 yrs and 58.5yrs

75 wives are under 50 years of age.

580

It is of great concern to PVA to note that 362 of these separated wives are married to veterans who have PTSD as an accepted disability by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

The age of these wives suggests that they are predominately the wives of Vietnam Veterans. PVA are of the opinion that the Vietnam Veterans, their wives and children have already paid far too high a price over the years as a direct result of their Vietnam Service. Many of these separated wives will continue to pay far too high a price should they lose their right as the legal wife to the Partners Service Pension,

If this proposed legislation is passed by the Senate these separated wives will now have no choice other than to apply to Centrelink for an income support payment such as Newstart or Widows Allowance which will be a saving to the 'whole of Government' a maximum of \$112.80 per fortnight per wife.

Some of the Centrelink Income Support Payments which could apply are as follows:

Newstart Allowance: \$449.30 per fortnight
Health Care Card - no Pensioner Concession Card
Able to receive \$62.00pf before payment reduced, then 50c in dollar up to \$250. Above \$250.00 \$94.00 + 60c in the dollar
No payment for period of 1 to 13 weeks if your liquid assets exceed \$2500.00

Widows Allowance: \$449.30 p/f if under 60yrs
(Incl divorced, Separated) \$491.80 p/f if aged 60 or over, after 9 months (includes *Pharmaceutical Allowance)
Health Care Card- no Pensioner Concession Card.
No payment for period of 1 to 13 weeks if your liquid assets Exceed \$2500.00

Disability Support Pension: \$562.10 per fort. Single rate
Pensioner Concession Card after 9months for those over 60yrs.
People whose start date on DSP was after 1 July 2006 are subject to a 15 hour per week work capacity rule.

Currently these Separated Spouses receive a Partner Service Pension from DVA of \$562.10 per fortnight and are able to earn \$132.00 per fortnight before the pension reduces. Income over \$132.00 is reduced 40c in the dollar for every dollar above \$132.00.

The age that a partner of a veteran is eligible to access Partners Service Pension is 58.5yrs unless there are dependant children or the veteran is in receipt of a T&PI, TTI or EDA compensation payment from DVA.

It seems unfortunate that the DVA cannot adopt one age, ie 58.5yrs rather than arbitrarily alternating between the civilian age 63 and 58.5 and then selecting whichever will be the most cost effective to the Government.

The fact is, that these separated wives are still legally married to the Veteran and are to be penalised because they could no longer, for any number of reasons and often, after many years of marriage, continue to cohabitate with their veteran husband due to his war caused disability.

Australian Partners of Veterans should be afforded **more resources, support and assistance** rather than be discarded as this proposed legislation part of the budget suggests.

They should have more input and assistance while with their veteran if required, and if the relationship breaks down, they should have specific programmes and strategies in place to give them the time and resources they require to regain their self esteem, confidence and work place skills if required. Most of these women should be recognized for their contribution to our Nation's military veterans.

The Partners of Veterans Association recommends:-

1. That the Senate rejects this budget cut in its entirety thereby allowing the legal wife to retain their current Partner Service Pension.
2. That the government look at programmes that would assist partners to obtain work skills.
3. That the government consider some form of recognition for the contribution that partners of veterans have made; particularly long term partners, often to the detriment of their own careers and/or health.

In conclusion, I thank you for taking the views of The Partners of Veterans Association into consideration in the Committee's Inquiry into Schedule 2 of the Bill regarding the partner service pension.



Narelle Bromhead
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