



The Coalition's Policy

Key Commitments

Australians are proud of our veterans. Our service men and women put their lives on the line for the nation and in the defence of our values.

Over 312,000 Australians rely on the government through support from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. These are veterans and their families, dependants, widows and children.

It is a community that is growing younger.

As the Department of Veterans' Affairs notes:

"In 2015–16, the under-70 cohort is projected to become the majority of DVA's clients, with the proportion growing over the ensuing five years. By 2020, one-third of DVA's clients will be aged under 60, and 20 per cent will be aged under 50."

The Coalition is committed to ensuring that current and future veterans and their families have the support that they need. As the Prime Minister said at the recent RSL National Conference in Melbourne, DVA will continue to look after veterans because they need a department dedicated to meeting their own special needs.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that no DVA services delivered through Medicare will be outsourced or privatised under the Coalition.

The Coalition has a strong record supporting our veterans.

We have ensured more financial support and services to individual veterans than ever before.

We delivered fair indexation for military superannuation.

The Coalition will continue to support Australia's veterans by:

- implementing a veterans mental health package
- streamlining the claims process for veterans and their families
- implementing an annual Ministerial veterans statement
- helping homeless veterans
- promoting jobs for veterans and improving the veterans transition process
- establishing a female veteran's policy forum and supporting our younger veterans
- supporting veterans' concerns on Mefloquine
- commemorating service and sacrifice

Our Plan for Veterans

The veteran community is a strong and an important part of the Australian ethos.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring that current and future veterans and their families have the support that they need though our Four Pillar plan:

- recognition of the unique nature of military service
- retention of a stand-alone Department of Veterans' Affairs
- tackling mental health challenges for veterans and their families
- supporting veterans through adequate advocacy and welfare services

The Coalition will continue to support Australia's veterans.

1. Supporting veterans mental health

The Coalition will continue to support the mental health of our veterans.

We will do more to ensure greater support to veterans, veterans' families, ex-service organisations and health care practitioners.

We will target early intervention to treat mental illness by:

- providing \$6 million to support the establishment of the 'Centenary Institute' proposed by Phoenix Australia in Melbourne to work collaboratively in support of practitioners and ex-service organisations who work closely with veterans with mental health concerns
- providing \$3.1 million to further extend access to the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service programme to include family members of current and former Australian Defence Force members who die by suicide or reported suicide; siblings of Australian Defence Force members killed in service related incidents; Defence Force Abuse Taskforce complainants; families of DART complainants; and adult sons and daughters (over 26) of post-Vietnam War veterans

Our commitment builds on the significant new investment the Coalition made to the existing non liability health care initiative to extend eligibility for mental health conditions to all current and former permanent members of the Australian Defence Force in the 2016 Federal Budget.

There has been extensive funding of research into the effects of military service on veterans and their families, however, there needs to be much more done to translate the findings of this research into practical assistance.

The Centenary Institute will provide clinical research and professional leadership for veterans' health. Early intervention and support for veterans and their families can reduce the onset and prevalence of mental health conditions.

Further expansion of the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service will support access to veterans and their families and encourage them to seek help early.

To support children whose parent or parents are serving Australian Defence Force members or a veteran effected by mental illness including PTSD we have provided \$2.1 million to the Kookaburra Kids Foundation.

Our commitment is important to helping veterans and their families cope and address mental illness.

2. Streamlining the claims process

The Coalition allocated \$48.7m in the 2016-17 budget to commence work required to fix the antiquated DVA I.T. system to deliver better customer service for veterans, underpinned by better processes and technology.

We have also implemented a number of initiatives designed to streamline the claims process including an alternative dispute resolution model which will enable more cases to be finalised without going to a full hearing and a new case management system for the Veterans Review Board that will streamline processes and reduce backlogs.

In addition, we will increase the amount veterans can be reimbursed for obtaining medical reports from the current \$457.50 to up to \$1,000 at a total cost of \$1.2 million over four years.

These reports are required by veterans to assist them as part of the appeals process.

These initiatives will make it easier for veterans to navigate the claims system and expedite the outcome of an appeal.

As part of the National Consultative process, the Coalition will establish a consultative forum comprised of advocates, pension officers and others involved in the DVA claims process. This Forum will review the existing claims process with a view to identifying impediments and considering improvements to the system.

3. Ministerial veteran's statement

The Coalition's commitment to the 'Four Pillars' of support for veterans and their families will be made transparent through an annual Ministerial statement to Parliament on key issues impacting the veteran community and the performance of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

This will be a transparent process which will measure the performance of the Department and increase accountability to the veteran community.

4. Helping homeless veterans

Our nation owes a great debt to those who have put their lives on the line for us and it is therefore essential that the community support those veterans who find themselves homeless and at risk of homelessness.

Whilst the provision of social housing is clearly a state and territory responsibility there is much more the Australian Government can do to address this important issue.

We will:

- convene a meeting of State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for veterans' affairs to address homelessness in the veteran community
- require Commonwealth agencies to identify whether its clients are veterans and to make that information available to ex-service and other organisations which provide support for homeless veterans
- work with the States and Territories to support a comprehensive nationwide study that brings together work already undertaken to obtain a thorough understanding of the extent of veteran homelessness and what all levels of government can do to address it

5. Promoting jobs for veterans

The Coalition will implement a new jobs programme for injured and ill veterans, which has been successfully trialled in South East Queensland and South Australia.

The programme will enhance the existing support currently provided to veterans as part of the Department of Veterans' Affairs' rehabilitation programmes by providing a greater focus on vocational outcomes, enhancing engagement with employers, and improving coordination with Defence as veterans transition to civilian life.

Under the trial, around 60 per cent of the veterans involved were successfully placed into civilian employment.

The Coalition will work with ex-service organisations and non-profits such as Soldier On and Mates4Mates to ensure that our younger veterans are catered for.

Employment and transition policies will be geared towards highlighting the value of employing veterans.

Working with ex-service organisations including Soldier On and the RSL, the Prime Minister will convene a forum in Sydney later in 2016 to promote the unique skills veterans can bring to employers and to find more effective ways for organisations to engage veterans and their families.

6. Creating a better veterans' transition process

The Coalition will put in place a 'Discharge with Documentation' policy across the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

This proposal will replace the current system where defence force personnel can leave the Defence Forces without the necessary documents that they need to claim benefits from other government agencies, including the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

This policy will provide a more seamless transition for service men and women from the defence forces and increase the capacity and efficiency of the Department of Veterans' Affairs in processing claims and serving veterans and their families.

To facilitate improved transition from the ADF to civilian life the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs will establish a taskforce to report back to portfolio Ministers on barriers to effective transition and suggested actions to address those barriers.

7. Supporting Female Veterans

The Coalition will establish a Female Veterans Policy Forum to provide a platform to help identify policy gaps and support initiatives to better support Australia's growing female veteran community.

We will provide \$600,000 to establish and run this forum.

Female veterans can face very different health and wellbeing challenges to their male colleagues and there is currently no specific platform to consider the needs of this group.

8. Supporting our younger veterans

The Coalition will provide \$4 million for a range of projects that promote social inclusion and peer to peer support for our younger veterans. This funding will be provided to ex-service organisations to assist younger veterans who engage with each other differently and don't want to be involved in formal structures in the same way that their older colleagues may do.

This initiative will be targeted at projects that seek to engage and actively involve our younger veterans. Examples of projects that could be supported include mentoring, team building, self-improvement and creative activities.

9. Supporting veterans' concerns on mefloquine

The Coalition understands there is concern among some veterans about the potential health impacts of the anti-malarial drug Mefloquine . The Coalition will support, and build awareness of the support available, to serving and ex serving ADF members and their families.

The Coalition will:

- establish a formal community consultation mechanism to provide an open dialogue on issues concerning Mefloquine between the Defence Links Committee and the serving and ex-serving ADF community
- develop a more comprehensive online resource that will provide information on anti-malarial medications
- establish a dedicated DVA Mefloquine support team to assist our serving and ex-serving ADF community with mefloquine-related claims, this will provide a specialised point of contact with the DVA
- direct the inter-departmental DVA-Defence Links Committee to examine the issues raised; consider existing relevant medical evidence and provide advice to the Government by November 2016

10. Commemorations

The Coalition will continue to support the planned Centenary of Service commemorations through to 2018.

In August this year we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the battle of Long Tan and the Vietnam War with a range of events including an official reception at Parliament House in Canberra, a stand to at the Australian War Memorial and a commemorative service at Australian Vietnam Forces Memorial on Anzac Avenue.

In the coming year we will commence planning with the Vietnam veteran community for appropriate commemorative activities to mark other significant battles that occurred during the Vietnam War including the 50th anniversary of the battles of Fire Support Bases at Coral and Balmoral.

We are committed to honouring the service and sacrifice of our veterans and in the 2016 Budget we provided \$7.5 to refurbish and rebuild 3,800 war graves in Papua New Guinea that have deteriorated and to undertake essential safety and maintenance work at the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum in Thailand.

The Choice

The Coalition has a strong record supporting our veterans.

We delivered fair indexation for military superannuation.

We provide \$11.7 billion a year to support veterans, including through health care, income support pensions and allowances.

We invested \$5 million for the Transition and Wellbeing Research programme, which is the largest study undertaken in Australia to examine the impact of military service on the mental health, physical and social health of serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

We invested \$46.4 million to expand the non-liability health care initiative so that any eligible veteran can now access mental health care services for post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and alcohol and substance abuse.

We provided greater access to the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, which we expanded to include service in disaster relief and boarder protection operations, training accidents, medically discharged personnel, submariners and partners and dependent children of these personnel.

We expanded the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service so that veterans and their families have greater access in more locations to the support they need.

The Coalition's strong record on veterans is contrasted by Labor's contribution.

Labor did not fulfil its 2007 commitment to 'maintain a generous military superannuation system'. By opposing legislation, Labor delayed fair indexation for more than 57,000 military superannuants on the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme.

Labor postponed the full rollout of the National ADF Family Health Care Programme twice. This has meant defence force families did not have guaranteed long term basic health care.

Labor reduced veterans' advocacy and welfare funding by \$1 million. The former Labor Government cut this funding without consultation.

Labor did not address concerns regarding the ICT systems of Department of Veterans' Affairs. This has created delays in claims times and DVA's ability to support veterans and veterans' families.

Costs

The Coalition will invest \$15 million to support our veterans and their families.



For further details of the Coalition's plan go to
www.liberal.org.au/our-plan
nationals.org.au/our-plan/