



The Coalition's plan for real action for
Veterans and their families

**Stand up for Australia.
Stand up for real action.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition is committed to supporting Australia's veterans and their families.

We understand that this can only be achieved with renewed compassion, understanding and action.

Labor has been all talk and no action when it comes to our veterans.

After making grand promises before the 2007 election, Labor has turned its back on the veteran community, stalling and delaying on key promises.

Australia's service personnel, past and present, after giving so much to their nation, deserve respect and recognition from the community for their service.

The Coalition has a plan for real action to support the veteran community.

Our plan includes the following initiatives:

1. New indexation arrangements for members of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme (DFRDB)

Under the Coalition, from July next year, beneficiaries of the DFRB and DFRDB schemes aged 55 and over will have their pensions indexed to whichever is the highest of three indexes - the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI).

2. Increased assistance for veterans' pharmaceutical costs

From 1 January 2012, the Coalition will remove out of pocket expenses for pharmaceuticals for disabled veterans in receipt of 50 per cent of the General Rate of Disability Pension, or higher (including EDA and TPI). This will enable more than 87,000 veteran disability pensioners, including our most disabled veterans, to save up to \$168 per year.¹

3. Increased recognition of veterans' widows and wives

The Coalition will formally recognize veteran widows and wives by establishing a 'VWWInc' website for networking, information and advice, conducting a national awareness campaign and an annual 'Recognition Award' event, and erecting a national memorial, to be publicly funded and erected following consultation with veterans' widows and wives.

4. Support an Indigenous War Widow Awareness Programme

The Coalition will develop a programme to identify, contact and encourage eligible Indigenous war widows to apply for their entitlements.

5. Enhance family support service for defence personnel, veterans and ex-service personnel during transition from the ADF

The Coalition will enhance the assistance available to defence personnel and their families during the transition from the Australian Defence Force into the general community, as well as provide veteran-to-veteran telephone support.

1. DVA Pensioner Summary, March 2010

6. Expanding the Building Excellence in Support and Training Programme (BEST) and the Training and Information Programme (TIP)

These programmes assist ex-service organisations to provide pension and welfare assistance with resources and support. Giving these organisations the best support and training will help members of the veteran community and their families to receive practical assistance with claims for assistance from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The Coalition will provide an additional \$7.5 million to expand these programmes.

7. Review of military compensation arrangements

The Coalition recognises the need to review this legislation to ensure it is achieving the goals it was established to achieve. The Coalition will respond to the Review and consult with ex-service organisations and veterans groups as part of a formal Government response.

8. Conduct a National Service records audit

The Coalition will conduct an audit of the locations of National Service Records, including the first and second intake, with a view to having these records centrally located.

9. Support the centenary of the Gallipoli landings

The Coalition fully supports the measures announced by the Government in relation to the centenary of the Gallipoli landings.

10. Build the Montevideo Maru memorial

The Coalition will provide \$100,000 in the 2011-12 Budget towards the construction of a Memorial to the people who lost their lives on the Montevideo Maru and in the Fall of Rabaul in 1942.

11. Support the Prime Minister's Advisory Council

A Coalition Government will continue to support the Prime Minister's Advisory Council. The Coalition supports initiatives that provide a clear link between ex-service organisations and the government.

12. Bring missing in action veterans home

The Coalition is committed to supporting the Korea Veterans' Association of Australia to develop a co-operative plan to recover the remains of 45 servicemen declared Missing in Action in Korea.

HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

After three years of Labor, Australia is heading down the wrong track.

Reckless spending, nearly \$90 billion of debt, six interest rate increases in a row, a \$57 billion deficit and Labor Government borrowings of \$700 million a week have put the Australian economy in a highly vulnerable position.

After three years of Labor's spending and broken promises, the Coalition offers a better way – real action, prudent financial management and sustainable growth, driven by policies designed for higher productivity, to get Australia back on the right track.

Australians can't afford another three years of Labor.

Labor has breached the trust of Australia's veterans and their families.

As a consequence of Labor's reckless spending, many promises will not be met. Labor made promises in a time of plenty. Since then, they have turned Australia's economy and budget on its head. Labor's inability to manage Australia's finances will directly impact on our veterans.

The Labor Government has turned its back on veterans, contemptuously stalling and delaying on key promises.

We owe it to future generations of veterans to develop policies and practices that are responsive and relevant to the changing needs of our veterans and their families.

Before the last election Labor promised to take action, but since then 11 public reviews have been initiated within the veterans' affairs portfolio. Labor is using these reviews to delay action and bad news.

The Coalition is committed to improving the way disabled veterans can access pharmaceuticals essential to maintaining their quality of life.

At the last election, Labor promised to tackle the cost of pharmaceuticals for war-caused disabilities as a priority in their first term of government.² Instead, they held a review and issued a discussion paper, without implementing any program ahead of the election.

After promising to address the issue in their first term, Labor has decided they need a second chance to address the problem in a second term. Labor cannot be trusted. They have had three years to meet their first commitment and failed.

2. 'Labor's Plan for Veterans' Affairs', Australian Labor Party Policy, November 2007, 12 at http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/22093/200711240102/www.alp.org.au/download/now/labors_plan_for_veterans_affairs.pdf

As the TPI Federation has said,

It is insulting to the veteran community for the Government on the one hand to say that it can address massive and complex issues like global warming but to properly address the administrative arrangements governing pharmaceutical costs is too expensive.³

The Labor Government commissioned a review of veterans' advocacy funding in 2009, the findings of which were due for release in the first quarter of 2010. The review was, apparently, not handed to the Minister until May 2010; the Minister then committed to releasing a 'Consultation Paper' on the recommendations by the end of June. Labor is delaying making a decision until after the election.

In 2009 the Australian Labor Party broke the trust of the veteran and ex-service community when it failed to increase veteran disability pensions to take account of rising costs of living. Despite months of questions, the Labor Government has refused to come clean about the cost of their decision. After the Coalition left a solution, the Labor Government created a problem and now refuses to acknowledge their breach of trust with disabled veterans.

3. TPI Federation Letter to Pharmaceuticals Review 30 May 2010.

THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION FOR VETERANS

The Coalition is committed to caring for Australia's veterans and their families and understands that this can only be achieved with renewed compassion, understanding and action.

The Coalition will not unfairly raise the expectations of the veteran community by making unrealistic commitments only to break this trust once elected. We take seriously every commitment in this document. The Coalition will deliver on its promises.

The Coalition will:

1. Introduce new indexation arrangements for the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme (DFRDB)

On 27 June 2010, the Coalition announced that if elected, new indexation arrangements will be introduced for members of one of the main superannuation schemes for ex-service personnel, the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme (DFRDB) and the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Scheme (DFRB), who are aged 55 years or older.

Under a Coalition Government, from 1 July next year, approximately 63,000 beneficiaries of this scheme will have their pensions indexed to whichever is the highest of three indexes - the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI).

Currently this superannuation scheme is indexed only in line with movements in CPI. This change would bring indexation arrangements for these superannuants into line with the aged and service pension.

These changes have been long sought by veterans' organisations as part of a fairer indexation system.

Widows of superannuants of this scheme will also benefit from this change.

2. Increase assistance for veterans' pharmaceutical costs

Veterans with a disability are paying up to \$168 per year in out of pocket pharmaceutical costs to treat disabilities caused in service in the Australian Defence Force.

From 1 January 2012, the Coalition will remove out of pocket expenses for pharmaceuticals for disabled veterans in receipt of 50 per cent of the General Rate of Disability Pension, or higher (including EDA and TPI).

The Coalition will set to 30 the maximum number of prescriptions which require a co-contribution payment of \$5.40. We will also increase the pharmaceuticals allowance by \$6.00 annually to ensure there are no out of pocket expenses for eligible veteran disability pensioners under this scheme.

This will enable more than 87,000 veteran disability pensioners, including our most disabled veterans, to save up to \$168 per year.⁴

3. Increase recognition of veterans' widows and wives

The Coalition will introduce several complementary initiatives to increase recognition of veteran widows and wives.

The Coalition will establish 'VWWInc' - a dedicated website for networking, information and advice for veterans' widows and wives.

The Coalition will also conduct a national awareness campaign, hold an annual 'Recognition Award' event, and erect a national memorial in consultation with VWW. Costs will be negotiated based on design and location of the memorial.

4. Support an Indigenous war widow awareness programme

The Coalition will develop and implement an information and awareness programme to help identify, contact and encourage eligible Indigenous war widows to apply for their entitlements.

5. Enhance family support service for defence personnel, veterans and ex-service personnel during transition from the ADF

The Coalition will enhance the assistance available to defence personnel and their families during the transition from the Australian Defence Force into the general community, as well as provide veteran-to-veteran telephone support.

A Coalition Government will develop a training and support programme for volunteer veterans and ex-service people to be available 24 hours a day, on a roster basis, to speak directly to veterans who just want to have a chat with someone who knows what they're going through. This programme will complement existing services provided by VVCS.

The *We'll Be There* programme will provide a family support network in the family setting for defence service personnel and recently retired veterans to help them make a satisfying adjustment to post-deployment and post-military life.

Drawing together experts from a range of family support fields, a Coalition Government will work to provide the support programmes necessary for families during deployments, support immediately following a deployment, and assistance with transition from military to civilian life.

4. DVA Pensioner Summary, March 2010

The programme will:

- Provide family support counselling to defence service personnel and veterans with exposure to uniquely demanding conditions of military service in combat operations;
- Provide services in a family setting that does not carry the stigma sometimes associated with other mental health initiatives; and
- Promote early intervention and break down the stigma often associated with seeking help from qualified professionals.

6. Expand the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Programme and the Training and Information Programme (TIP)

The BEST programme was developed by the previous Coalition Government to assist ex-service organisations to provide pension and welfare assistance with resources and support.

By equipping ex-service organisations with the best support and training, members of the veteran community and their families can receive practical assistance with claims for assistance from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Members of the veteran community rely on the knowledge of Pension and Welfare Officers and advocates (who are often volunteers) to navigate support and assistance available from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The Coalition will provide an additional \$7.5m over the forward estimates for the BEST and TIP programmes. We will ensure funding is available to enable veteran and ex-service organisations to continue to deliver high-standard support and assistance to veterans, ex-service people and their families.

This funding will be applied in consultation with ex-service organisations and in line with the adoption of recommendations accepted as part of the Review of Advocacy Funding. The Coalition will respond to the recommendations of the review following the consultation period and discussions with ex-service leaders.

7. Review of Military Compensation Arrangements

Many members of the veterans' community have expressed concern at the inflexibility of the current Act and the compulsory aspect of the rehabilitation requirement. The Coalition recognises the need to review legislation to ensure it is achieving the goals it was established to achieve.

The Coalition will engage in consultation with the veteran and ex-service community about the review recommendations and will ensure that the views of the ex-service community are considered as part of the implementation process.

8. Conduct a National Service records audit

The Coalition is committed to conducting an audit of the locations of National Service Records, including the first and second intake, with a view to having these records centrally located. We will provide funding to audit locations where records are held, then to develop a national archiving system to enable ease of access online to the location of the file.

9. Support the centenary of the Gallipoli landings

The Coalition fully supports the measures announced by the Government in relation to the centenary of the Gallipoli landings.

A Coalition Government will ensure that this historic and very special day is fully resourced and appropriately honours and thanks not only past but also present and future veterans.

10. Build the Montevideo Maru memorial

The Coalition will provide \$100,000 in the 2011-12 Budget towards the construction of a Memorial to the people who lost their lives on the Montevideo Maru and in the Fall of Rabaul in 1942.

It is anticipated these funds will expedite the construction of the Memorial in time for the 70th anniversary in 2012.

11. Support the Prime Minister's Advisory Council

A Coalition Government will continue to support the Prime Minister's Advisory Council. The Coalition supports initiatives that provide a clear link between ex-service organisations and the government.

To ensure that ex-service organisations right across Australia can have their concerns heard by government, the Coalition will consider the option of the Council visiting each state and regional centre. Our aim will be to ensure ex-service organisations and individuals can raise issues of concern directly with the Council.

12. Bring missing in action veterans home

The Coalition is committed to supporting the Korea Veterans' Association of Australia to develop a co-operative plan to recover the remains of 45 servicemen declared Missing in Action in Korea.

COSTINGS

In addition to the new veterans' indexation arrangements announced by the Coalition on 27 June 2010, the Coalition will commit a further \$45.6 million over the forward estimates towards these initiatives to support veterans.

This funding will be provided from the more than \$28 billion in recurrent savings that have been identified by the Coalition over the forward estimates.

These savings are a result of cutting Labor's waste and mismanagement and redirecting funding from inefficient and poorly performing Labor Government programmes.

	2010-11 \$M	2011-12 \$M	2012-13 \$M	2013-14 \$M	TOTAL \$M
Pharmaceutical Safety Net extension	-	7.6	15.2	15.2	38.0
Support for BEST and TIP Programmes	-	2.5	2.5	2.5	7.5
Montevideo Maru Memorial	-	0.1	-	-	0.1

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