



# VETERANS' AFFAIRS

## Fair treatment for those who serve

Providing proper support for ex-service men and women

The welfare of veterans is of utmost importance. Veterans should be respected not only because of the service they provide, but also because their experiences of the horror of war can provide powerful and cautionary lessons.

### > HOLISTIC REVIEW OF VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS

The current veterans' entitlements system is a mess. Rates of entitlement are inconsistent and arbitrary. Application and assessment processes are labyrinthine and circuitous. For many veterans, the bureaucracy of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is a barrier to getting what they are entitled to.

The Greens would undertake a root and branch review of the veterans' entitlement system. The review would determine whether current entitlements are sufficient and whether current eligibility criteria are fair, including access to health cards, disability pensions, housing, and superannuation arrangements. We need to understand whether entitlements have kept pace with changes in the cost of living. The Greens' believe funding should be guaranteed for medically certified needs, and should not be subject to any arbitrary budget cap.

This review would also recommend a redesign of the entitlements process to make it more legible and accessible, and recommend an overhaul of the delivery of support services. Complaints about DVA are on the rise which is an indicator that the system is failing. The review of service delivery should consider assigning each veteran a liaison officer to act as a single point of contact to navigate the system.

Appeal mechanisms for veterans' are also in need of reform. The Greens support the establishment of a single pathway for appeals of entitlement decisions.

### > VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

The monitoring of veterans' health and wellbeing needs to be vastly improved. There is currently no coordinated process for collecting information on the health of veterans. The Greens would require Defence and DVA to report annually to the parliament on the 'state of mental health' of current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members. This would include data on the rates of mental ill-health, homelessness and other indicators of stress among veterans.

The Greens' would also require Defence to provide a full report to parliament on the administration of mefloquine and other anti-malarial drugs to ADF members, including the number of ADF members administered these drugs, their consent to this administration, and the dosage administered.

### > MORAL INJURY

Moral injury is an emerging concept that refers to feelings of grief, shame and regret that might result from things seen or done during conflict. Moral injury seeks to describe the psychological, spiritual and cultural disconnect that veterans might have upon returning home.

This is not a new phenomenon. Many veterans don't want to talk about their war service because of how removed it is from domestic life. Naming this experience can help give it legitimacy and encourage veterans to seek help with any difficulties they are having and improve their mental wellbeing. The Greens support the Defence and ADF formally recognising moral injury and developing a program to help identify and treat veterans who are suffering.

### > VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS

There is conflicting evidence about the rates of homelessness among veterans. DVA suggest that no more than 300 veterans are of no-fixed-address, but veterans' groups suggest the real figure is as much as ten times this. Irrespective, the fact that any veteran gets to the point where they don't have regular shelter is an indicator that the system is failing. And nearly all veterans that identify as being homeless are suffering some form of mental ill-health, and this mental ill-health has often progressed further as a result of their homelessness.

The Australian Greens believe that there needs to be an injection of funding into programs addressing homelessness. Homes for Heroes is a rehabilitation service that provides ongoing psychosocial support for veterans. It has been very successful at connecting with veterans and helping them stabilise their lives. The Greens' would provide \$10 million annually to Homes for Heroes for them to expand the reach of their services.

The Greens also believe that well-resourced veterans' groups, such as the RSL, should call upon their reserves to provide further support for these programs.