



CARING FOR VETERANS' FAMILIES SUPPORTING PARTNERS & CARERS

The Greens' plan to provide recognition and support for Veterans' families

Veterans' families are often disadvantaged by their loved ones' service but are not always recognised and supported in the way they deserve. Partners and carers play a crucial role in caring for veterans. The Greens have a plan to support those who support our veterans.

We understand there are long-lasting consequences of sending men and women to serve on our behalf, not only for the veterans themselves, but also for their partners and families. These range from financial and employment concerns to impacts on physical and mental health.

The Greens have a detailed plan to care for veterans' families through a range of measures designed to assist them financially, in employment, with better mental health support and in their role as carers.

> SUPPORTING VETERANS' FAMILIES

The Greens recognise that, as a community, we owe the partners and families of veterans a huge debt. Government decisions have sent their loved ones to serve on our behalf into hazardous and often highly distressing situations.

If, as a nation, we are willing to send people to conflict zones to serve in our name, it is only right that we are willing to care for them fairly and properly when they return. This includes supporting those who care for them – their partners and families.

The Australian Greens' plan will invest \$60 million over the forward estimates to:

- **Allow children of veterans** acting as a carer, and parents and siblings of veterans killed in service, to access counselling through the Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service (VVCS).
- **Grant bereavement payments** to partners who have separated from their veteran partner where it is established that the veteran's mental ill-health played a part in the separation.

- **Increase funeral benefits** under the *Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986* from \$2,000 to \$4,000, subject to review every five years.
- **Make the Department of Veterans Affairs** responsible for assessing the eligibility of veterans' carers for the Centrelink Carer Allowance.
- **Change the current situation regarding Carer Allowance so it is no longer** cancelled after the veteran has been hospitalised for six weeks.
- **Review the Carer Supplement** every five years, to ensure the payment is adequate.
- **Increase Veterans' Home Care respite services** to 260 hours per year.
- **Establish and maintain** a 'Jobs for Defence Families' website.
- **Provide funding to the Defence Community Organisation** to administer an induction program for defence families.
- **Bring forward the reporting date** for the Vietnam Veterans' Family Study to December 2013.

> BETTER ASSISTANCE

The Greens care about the veteran community and know that this means caring for veterans' families. Those close to a veteran often have unique experiences as a result of the veteran's service and need access to adequate support services.

Our plan includes funding to allow children caring for their veteran parent, and parents and siblings of those killed in service to access counselling through the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). Often those close to veterans are susceptible to challenging experiences and stresses. The option of counselling is a tangible way to support veterans' loved ones.



As part of caring for veterans' families, we will also grant bereavement payments, upon the death of a veteran, to partners who have separated from their veteran partner where it is established that the veteran's mental ill-health played a part in the separation. This initiative will recognise the unique pressures veterans' partners experience which can affect their lives and relationships.

The Greens will also increase funeral benefits under the *Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986*, from \$2,000 to \$4,000. This will be subject to review every five years. Funeral costs have risen significantly since the entitlement was last increased. Families of veterans need sufficient support, particularly during the traumatic and emotional time after losing a loved one.

Improving access to counselling services, supporting veterans' partners and increasing funeral benefits are all steps to improve the care we extend to veterans' families.

> RECOGNISING VETERANS' CARERS

The Greens know the important role carers play in ensuring veterans are supported and have access to the services they need – but we are often asked the question “who is caring for the carers?” We're responding with a series of initiatives centred on supporting veterans' carers.

Firstly, our plan has provisions to make the Department of Veterans Affairs responsible for assessing the eligibility of veterans' carers for the Centrelink Carer Allowance. This will ensure that the unique circumstances of veterans and their carers, such as the effects of mental health conditions like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), will be better considered during the assessment process.

We will also change the current situation where the Carer Allowance is cancelled when a veteran has been hospitalised for six weeks. Under our plan, the Carer Allowance will only be suspended, not cancelled – meaning carers won't have to go through the difficult process of reapplying for the benefit and losing a significant amount of money while waiting for their application to be approved. The current system is unnecessarily cumbersome and distressing for veterans and their carers, who often rely on this income.

The Greens will also review the Carer Supplement every five years to ensure the payment is adequate and appropriate in regard to its original purpose and is consistent with other similar payments.

We'll increase Veterans' Home Care respite services from 196 to 260 hours each year. We know that carers are under a lot of pressure and it is crucial they are able to have a break from their ongoing caring responsibilities, knowing their loved one is being appropriately cared for. Whether it is time to get a

haircut, do the shopping or go for a walk with a friend for some support, we know that respite time is crucial in maintaining wellbeing for carers.

> ADDRESSING NEEDS OF DEFENCE FAMILIES

Our plan to care for veterans' families also includes provisions to extend care to families of current defence force personnel. We will address some of the unique needs of this group through three additional initiatives.

Firstly, our plan will fund the establishment and maintenance of a 'Jobs for Defence Families' website to connect defence families with jobs that are suitable for their circumstances. The nature of defence service, involving frequent moves, can make it difficult for partners to find employment. Yet they often have a unique range of skills, and resilience, which makes them great employees. This initiative will assist them to secure employment.

We will also provide funding for the Defence Community Organisation to administer an induction program for defence families. The aim of the program will be to educate defence families about available support services and what to expect during postings, as well as family and relationship strategies, health, mental health and employment advice.

Finally, we will bring forward the reporting date for the Vietnam Veterans' Family Study. The study was undertaken by the Department of Veterans' Affairs to look at the experiences of Vietnam veterans and Defence personnel who served between 1962 and 1975 but did not go to Vietnam.¹

The report is due to be released during 2014 but we will reinstate the original reporting timeframe, ensuring the report is released by December 2013. It is likely the report will encompass important research about what makes families resilient and can therefore be used to shape the supports and structures needed to care for defence families in the future.

> CARING FOR WHAT MATTERS

The veteran community and their families face unique challenges as a result of their defence force service, undertaken on behalf of our nation.

Our plan is strong and compassionate, giving veterans' families the support they need to care for our veterans and to manage the stress and challenges associated with their role.



The Greens know that if we are willing to ask people to undertake service on our behalf, we must care for them right through, and at the end of their service. This package, costed at \$60 million over the forward estimates, is a step towards ensuring such care.

The Australian Greens are committed to extending care to defence force personnel, veterans and their families across their lifespan, ensuring better mental health and life outcomes for those who have served our country and those who support them.

ⁱDepartment of Veterans' Affairs (2013), *Vietnam Veterans' Family Study – An Intergenerational Study*,
<http://www.dva.gov.au/health_and_wellbeing/research/familystudyprogram/vietnam_vets_family_study/Pages/index.aspx>