

ESTABLISH DVA INQUIRY & AUTOMATICALLY GIVE AUSSIE VETERANS HEALTH GOLD CARDS

1 June 2014 Senator Elect Lambie



DON'T MAKE AMERICA'S MISTAKE – Senator Elect for Tasmania and Palmer United spokesperson for Veterans' Affairs Jacqui Lambie has called on the Abbott government to establish an Independent Judicial Inquiry into Veterans' Affairs – while putting in place a new policy which automatically awards *as a right of service*, a health Gold Card to former ADF members who've served in peace keeping roles or combat zones.

"There is substantial evidence and testimony from both young and old Australian Veterans - that the same systemic problems and delays in Veterans' medical treatment, recently discovered in America has occurred for years in Australia." said Senator Elect Lambie.

"Veterans' GP, Dr Ray Huntley reported at a recent public meeting in QLD that there were significant delays (3 months) for his digger clients to be admitted to hospital. However, the most compelling reason for an Independent Judicial Inquiry is the Australian Government cover up of the high suicide rate of former ADF members. Some Veterans' advocates have informed me that it as high as 200 or greater." Senator Elect Lambie said.

"The Australian Vet. Affairs Department chooses deliberately not to keep accurate official statistics on Veteran suicides - because those figures would be a political embarrassment and a national scandal. Another reason for an Independent Judicial Inquiry is that Australian Veterans report that the damage done to them by the Department of Veterans' Affairs while processing their claims - is often worse than the damage done to them after they faced the enemy.

One young Afghanistan Vet. told me after Dr Ray's meeting, that he'd rather fight the Afghan Taliban than the bureaucrats in the Australian Department of Vet Affairs. And that he'd buried 4 of his mates following their suicides after discharging from the Army." Senator Elect Lambie said. "Dr Huntley's public meeting in Burpengary QLD was also attended by two Federal Liberal members of Parliament (Wyatt Roy / Teresa Gambaro) who heard first-hand from about 40 Veterans, just how dysfunctional, incompetent and dangerous the Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs has become.

In good faith, I ask the Vet Affairs Minister Ronaldson and Prime Minister Abbott to immediately implement a policy - suggested from the floor of the meeting by a young returned digger - which ensures that Veterans who return from overseas active deployments after discharge, are automatically issued Health Gold Cards." said Senator Elect Lambie. "This would remove and make redundant an expensive medico/legal industry and government bureaucracy, which has sprung up around the assessment, qualification and issuing of Gold Cards.

For example, if every one of the approximately 60,000 young diggers* who have served in peace keeping roles or in active service since 1999 automatically received a Gold Card as a right of service on discharge - it would only cost the Department about \$1.5 B a year. "said Senator Elect Lambie. "The savings to the taxpayer by eliminating doctors' reports, legal fees, departmental inquiries, appeals tribunals, and Veterans' review boards - would more than compensate for the average annual cost of \$25k for medical treatment for a Gold Card holder.



Put simply, let's direct scarce public funds to our Vets' medical treatment instead of lawyers and bureaucrats for damaging and useless administrative fights. I invite the Minister to make public those administrative costs and debate this issue.

Most importantly, the new Gold Card policy put forward by PUP and the Vets would drastically reduce any further physical and psychological trauma that former ADF members suffer after being forced to deal with a complicated, hostile and incompetent DVA bureaucracy." said Senator Elect Lambie.

"I also call on Minister Ronaldson to give a guarantee that his department managers didn't have the same wicked political pressures and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) placed on them that has also been placed on their American counterparts. For example, Australian Veterans need to know that DVA managers do not receive financial incentives or promotion to meet departmental targets - or are the subject of threats of the sack - as a motivation to meet government budgets - and that official rejections of Gold Card applications, are not linked to unfair budget restrictions imposed by politicians." said Senator Elect Lambie.

"At Dr Huntley's meeting it became obvious that many Veterans received their health Gold Card entitlements only after a deliberately long, exhaustive and expensive bureaucratic battle, with most lasting 5 years - some as long as 10 years. That bureaucratic battle significantly harms our Vets and their families - and unnecessarily adds cost to the Australian taxpayer.



It's time to listen to the young Aussie Vets and make Gold Cards an automatic right for all ADF members who have served in peacekeeping, war, or war like conditions." said Senator Elect Lambie.

"Federal Liberal members Wyatt Roy and Teresa Gambaro met and heard Dr Huntley and his Veteran patients at the same time as myself – I expect them both to support my call for an Independent Judicial Inquiry into the Veteran suicide rate – and also support PUP's new health Gold Card policy.

There are about 10,000 young and older Vets in Tasmania, I also expect all local Liberal MP's and Senators to support my call. This will guarantee that all Australian Veterans (unlike American veterans) receive timely medical treatment and our appalling suicide rate is properly examined and addressed." said Senator Elect Lambie. **Contact Senator Elect Lambie – 0439 354 177**

ADMINISTRATION OF MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT YOUNGER VETERANS

Department of Veterans' Affairs



The profile of the Australian veteran and ex-service community has changed over the years with the decline in World War II, Korean War and war widow populations and the emergence of a growing younger cohort.

The younger veteran cohort includes the estimated 50000 ADF personnel deployed across the globe since the East Timor deployment in 1999, which marked the beginning of a heightened operational tempo by the ADF that continues to the present day.

Between 4000 and 6000 ADF personnel discharge each year, most of whom are relatively young—the average age of separation for officers is around 34 years, and 27 for other ranks. Many of these young members will have been deployed several times and more than half are married or in long term relationships, and also have children.

Further, the members of this younger cohort have indicated that they have different needs and expectations compared to their older counterparts (who are the majority of DVA clients), requiring DVA to adapt its programs and services accordingly. DVA has acknowledged that communicating and engaging effectively with the younger cohort is a particular challenge. DVA delivers mental health services to eligible members of the ADF and ex-service communities¹⁹, and develops policy responses to the mental health needs of its clients, in a complex and evolving environment.

The profile of mental health disorders and the pattern of usage of mental health services by members of the ADF and ex-service communities differ from that found in the wider community. Reflecting the unique demands of military service and culture. Further, the profile of the veteran community has been changing, with the emergence of a significant younger cohort of veterans, many of whom have served in the numerous ADF deployments of the past decade.

The younger cohort of ADF members is particularly at risk of having a mental health disorder, with many of these individuals leaving the military with an undiagnosed and untreated mental health condition. These young ex-service members are particularly at risk of not receiving the mental health treatment they need, as they do not necessarily maintain links with the ADF or engage with DVA after they leave the military, and they have proven difficult to reach through traditional means such as the ex-service organisations

Reference: [The Auditor-General Audit Report No.48 2011–12 Performance Audit](#)

Images: [Ben Quilty paintings](#)