

FOR THOSE WHO STAND BESIDE THEM

The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc believes that the Productivity Commission, while diligent in ensuring each voice had the opportunity to be heard, and commendable in providing access for Public Hearings, has missed the point of what it means to be a Veteran, for a Partner to care for a disabled Veteran or to raise the children of that Veteran. The proposed Australian Defence Veterans Covenant states:

“We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice demanded of all who commit to defend our nation.

We undertake to preserve the memory and deeds of all who served and promise to welcome, embrace and support all military Veterans as respected and valued members of our community”

From the Productivity Commissioner’s Report:

RECOMMENDATION 16.4 BETTER TARGETED ELIGIBILITY FOR THE GOLD CARD

The Australian Government should amend the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 to remove eligibility for the Gold Card for anyone other than veterans with severe service-related impairments. Unless they qualify through having severe service-related impairments, this would remove eligibility from:

- All dependants,
- Veterans over 70 years old with qualifying service,
- Veterans on the service pension who meet the means test,
- Veterans on the service pension who are also receiving a disability pension above the general rate, or who have between 30 and 60 MRCA impairment points.

The Australian Government should provide financial compensation to dependants who lose eligibility for the Gold Card.

All current Gold Card holders should retain their eligibility.

RECOMMENDATION 16.5 NO FURTHER EXTENSIONS OF GOLD CARD ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for the Gold Card should not be extended to any new categories of veterans, dependants of other civilians who are not currently eligible for such a card. All current Gold Card holders should retain their eligibility.

As President of our Association whose soul interest is partners, widows/widowers and their families, I, and my Board find these Recommendations to be ill conceived, unclear and contradictory from one paragraph to the next.

It would appear from the wording that Widows/Widowers, Orphans and Double Orphans of Service persons are to have their eligibility stripped from accessing a Gold Card following the death of their totally disabled Veteran or parent(s).

The recommendation to remove Widows/Widowers and families from access to the Gold Card is appalling and ill thought out. By its removal it suggests a complete lack of respect toward the Veteran, the Partner and the Family. It would be tantamount to saying to the Veteran Community, the majority of those from the Vietnam era and also those who have deployed since, that their service has no merit.

This recommendation is yet another insult to our Vietnam Veterans who were treated appallingly whilst serving in Vietnam and also upon their return. It is the Vietnam Veterans Widows who will be among the first to be impacted should this recommendation be implemented. It is also important to note that approx. half of those who served in Vietnam were conscripts.

It is not all right to deny future Widows/Widowers and orphaned children whose veteran parent dies of a war caused injury or illness, the same benefit as those already in receipt of a Gold Card, it is not all right to no longer recognise these women, men and children as belonging to the Veteran Community.

“Caring for Veterans and their Families” certainly has a hollow ring when it apparently doesn’t refer to the Wife/Husband/Mother/Partner or children once the Veteran has passed away.

The Partners of Veterans have already sacrificed countless years to care for disabled Veterans with almost no help, absolutely no recognition and in many cases have had to also sacrifice their own career. Partners in the general community, if they so wish, were and are, able to have a career and accrue Superannuation for themselves, there were no impediments for them. Partners/Carers of a disabled Veteran are not given that opportunity not to mention the fact this this caring has had a detrimental impact on their own mental and physical health, which has been proved by numerous studies.

What compensation is the partner of a deceased veteran whose death is combat related regardless of age, considered to be worthy to receive?

Currently they receive the War Widows/Widowers Compensation Payment which includes a Gold Card and if they meet the criteria they are able to apply for the Income Support Supplement. Younger Widows/Widowers have a choice of receiving a portion of a lump sum payment and still retain fortnightly payments, but in all cases a Gold Card is issued. We truly believe that is the least the Australian Government and its people owe dependants of those who risked their lives for this country and who paid a huge price for that sacrifice

Members of our Association will be directly impacted by any changes regarding the Productivity Commission’s recommendation to Government to strip the Gold Card from the dependants of Veterans with qualifying service.

Some of these Partners/Carers are no longer young but those younger Partners whose Veteran may pass away from war caused illnesses, mental health issues and

Post traumatic stress may have young children and are in no position to seek employment in order to supplement this income. Would the Government deny these War Widows and Widowers access to the Gold Card simply in a cost cutting exercise? Unfortunately the partners/carers/widows are an easy target but it should not be overlooked that these are the very people who have saved the Government untold millions by caring for our disabled war veterans and now are the same people who can be targeted in this disgraceful manner.

Government would still have to pay for the majority of these dependants through the Public Health system as Private Health cover would be well beyond their means. How many Veterans with life threatening illnesses or mental health issues will opt out of treatment, or worse, to ensure his/her partner is eligible for the Gold Card before the recommended year of 2025 rolls around?

I have already had a call from a seriously ill Veteran who is ready to cease treatment and give up to ensure that his wife will be a recipient of a Gold Card. How a recommendation to have something as vital as a Gold Card stripped from dependants of a Veteran in the future while still being retained by others who were eligible prior to 2025 is a disgrace and should never have been contemplated.

The report of the Productivity Commission is a detailed and comprehensive paper and some of the recommendations are innovative and well thought out. A number of suggestions from our own Association have been proposed and we thank the PC for recognising the validity of those suggestions.

We are disappointed however, that the Veterans' Dependants are seen to be of no consequence and can be treated as collateral damage. The Veterans themselves, the many who have been in contact with our Association, are disgusted and disappointed that their Partners/Carers and families have been considered to be of so little worth.

For these reasons, we ask that the recommendations regarding the removal of the Gold Card for eligible dependants of a Veteran fail and that the value to the community of the support and care of the Veteran by his/her Partner be recognised in the future, as it has been in the past.

Yours sincerely,
Heather Evans.
President.