

Media Release - Minister Keogh - Making Sure Veterans Get the Very Best Support Available

Department of Veterans' Affairs

OFFICIAL



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MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
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OPINION PIECE

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MAKING SURE VETERANS GET THE VERY BEST SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Every time someone pulls on an Australian Defence Force (ADF) uniform they make a solemn vow.

They are pledging to serve and defend our nation, to protect the values we hold dear – freedom, democracy, equality, respect and a fair go. All Australians owe a debt of gratitude to our ADF personnel and veterans. It is our duty to repay their commitment, to ensure that after service they and their families also get a fair go.

This week we mark 50 years since the Governor-General's proclamation of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

This was a war that was at times contentious at home, and for some veterans their service not recognised as it should have been.

The Australian Government is honouring those who served, and throughout this commemorative year, will specifically recognise and honour the service and sacrifice of Vietnam veterans and their families.

This will culminate in a national service on 18 August on Vietnam Veterans' Day, the annual day of commemoration for those who served during the Vietnam War.

We know military service is unique and carries considerable risks for a person's physical and mental wellbeing. While not all veterans are negatively impacted by their service, we know only too well that many are.

All current and former permanent members of the ADF or reservists who have rendered at least one day of full-time service are eligible for a Veteran White Card through the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). That includes National Servicemen, even if they were never deployed.

The White Card gives veterans access to medical treatment for accepted health conditions related to their ADF service. Importantly, a White Card also provides veterans access to fully funded and confidential mental health care, for life, without needing to prove their condition is linked to their ADF service. This is called non-liability health care.

Under non-liability health care, a veteran can access fully funded treatment for mental health conditions from a range of providers. This could include anyone from a psychiatrist or psychologist, a GP, mental health social worker or mental health occupational therapist.

Where the treating mental health provider considers it beneficial, extra services like exercise physiology, physiotherapy or nutrition advice may also be funded. These supports are generally in the nature of short-term assistance to establish a healthy eating plan or develop a self-directed exercise plan.

I am aware of recent reports that exercise physiology services have been limited for veterans who are entitled to non-liability health care, which, understandably would have raised concerns for many people who rely on these services. I want to be clear, there has been no change to treatment eligibility for White Card holders who access services under non-liability health care.

Physical wellbeing can be hugely beneficial for someone who is living with a mental health condition. This is why DVA includes the option for general practitioners (GPs) to recommend exercise therapy as part of a treatment plan for mental health conditions, to give veterans the tools to self-manage their exercise.

In recent weeks some providers who are treating veterans have had claims for this type of service rejected. This has resulted from some claims not being clear that these services are part of a treatment plan.

When making a claim, providers are required to state the specific mental health condition being treated. This has always been a requirement and it is not a new rule, however, there has been some recent improvements in confirming requirements are met before a payment is made.

I encourage any provider with a recently rejected claim to resubmit it with the additional information. The specific mental health condition being treated will be listed on the referral from the veteran's GP. This should allow their funded treatment to resume.

The Albanese Government is committed to enhancing and protecting the wellbeing of everyone in our veteran community. We want to empower veterans to live the life they want to lead after service. This means providing the physical and mental health services they need. A big part of that is through comprehensive non-liability mental health care.

Whether a veteran served in WWII, Vietnam, undertook National Service, or was part of more recent conflicts, they all deserve the very best support. Their families do too. The Government is committed to delivering a package of practical support measures to achieve just that. It's the least we can do.

Thank you for your service.

Editors note: Any veterans or family members of veterans who are struggling with their mental health, can access free counselling support, 24/7 through Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling on 1800 011 046.

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