



With an election due in the next few months Labor has been working hard developing policies to address issues of concern. We have already committed to;

- Full indexation for Above General Rate pensioners.
- Funding a health study into the children of Vietnam Veterans
- Enhancing Veterans' suicide prevention services.

As we move closer to the election I trust we will demonstrate to you that a Rudd Labor Government is genuinely committed to engaging with the Veterans and ex-service community.

**Alan Griffin MP**

## Labor Commits to Full Indexation for Above General Rate Pensioners

On 6 May 2007, the Federal Labor Leader Kevin Rudd and Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin announced that an elected Rudd Labor Government would increase benefits for our nation's most severely disabled war Veterans.

Under the plan all Above General Rate pensions would be indexed to movements in the cost and standard of living.

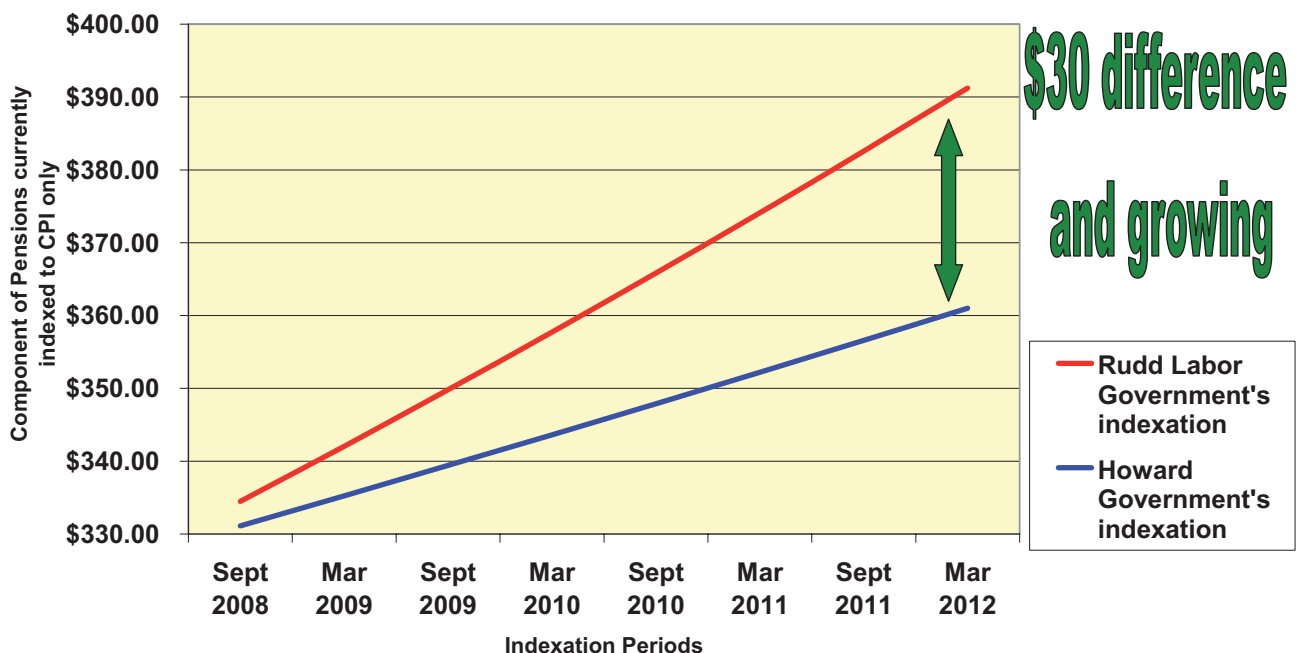
In contrast to Labor's action on this important issue the Howard Government has made it clear the current indexation regime would remain. This means that recipients of the Special Rate (TPI and TTI), Intermediate Rate and the Extreme Disablement Adjustment pensions would be significantly better off under Labor than they would be under the current Government.

According to current projections, after the first four years of implementation (the forward estimates) recipients of these pensions will be \$30 better off per fortnight and have an extra \$1700 in their back pockets. Labor supports the catch up payments contained within the budget and will implement indexation on top of these payments.

The graph below demonstrates the projected difference between Labor and the Government's policy. The graph reflects the amount of these pensions that is currently indexed to CPI only. These pensions will grow at a far greater rate under Labor's policy.

*For more information on Labor's Indexation Policy see page 2.*

**Difference between Labor and the Coalition's policy on indexation of the TPI, TTI, Intermediate and EDA pensions**



# Indexation – The Full Story Explained...

## **Labor's commitment will affect more than 43,000 War Veterans with disabilities who have fought in conflicts such as World War 2, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, the Gulf War, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.**

Labor's commitment will ensure Veterans are not required to go cap-in-hand to the Government every budget year, or worse, each election year. This initiative will also ensure disabled Veterans who are left unable to work by their service to the defence of Australia can share in the bounty of a strong economy, and will not have to suffer a declining relative standard of living. Federal Labor believes this is a fair and sensible policy.

Currently only the Above General Rate component of these pensions is indexed to movements in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). The general rate component is indexed to CPI only. Labor will index both components to movements in CPI or MTAWE, whichever is greater.

In the 2007-08 Federal Budget, the Government announced a catch up payment of \$50 and \$25 per fortnight respectively for Special and Intermediate Rate pensioners. This measure was welcomed and will also be implemented under a Labor Government. Therefore if you are a Special Rate TPI pensioner not only will you get the \$50 catch up payment you will also have the future security of a fairer indexation system.

The Howard Government has made it clear they will not be offering any change to the indexation regime currently in place. The Minister is on record as saying that Labor's policy is "irrational", and he will not commit to preventing any future erosion of the pension, instead resting his laurels on a catch up payment. However, the catch up payment alone does not address the underlying issue of erosion.

It is disappointing that EDAs were the only pensioners above the general rate that did not receive a catch up payment from the Government. This is despite the fact they have to pass a strict lifestyle test that demonstrates the extreme effects their disabilities have on their life.

Labor will not forget these Veterans and has already committed to indexing their pensions to rises in the standard of living.

This announcement is the culmination of more than a year's work and research, involving extensive consultation within the Veterans' community, ex-service organisations, Parliamentary Library and other experts. In particular, it reflects the hard work and contribution of a range of ESOs including the TPI Federation, The Vietnam Veterans' Association and Federation, the Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council and the RSL.

Labor will be happy to remove the politics from indexation and deliver justice, security and fairness for our most severely disabled war Veterans. It is after all the least that they deserve.

## **KEY POINTS**

- TPI, TTI, Intermediate and EDA pensioners will be significantly better off under a Rudd Labor Government.
- Under a Rudd Labor Government all Above General Rate pensions will now be indexed to movements in the cost of living and the standard of living.
- Labor supports the catch up payments contained within the budget. Its commitment is on top of these payments.
- The Howard Government has made it clear that they will not be changing the current indexation regime for these pensions.
- This policy is the result of more than a year's work by Labor.
- The TPI Federation, The Vietnam Veterans' Association and Federation, the Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council and the RSL have all supported Labor's policy.

Herald Sun – 7 May 2007

**Labor's  
plan wins  
veterans**

Canberra Times – 6 May 2007

**Labor's boost for disabled veterans**

## Labor will Conduct a Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study

Alan Griffin recently announced that a study into the health of the children of Vietnam Veterans would be conducted under a Labor government.

It is widely known that children of Vietnam Veterans have a suicide rate three times higher than other children. It is also known that they suffer to a greater degree from spina bifida manifesta, cleft lip, cleft palate, adrenal cancer and acute myeloid leukemia. This study would address the specific health and mental health needs of these children.

At the last election the Howard Government refused to commit to a study, instead committing only to a feasibility study. The feasibility study found a further study was viable and worthwhile. However, another study was announced into possible research protocols.

During Estimates, the Department confirmed that the second study involves a "preliminary road test" of the protocols, processes and instruments, before a data analysis and linkages plan is developed by the end of June 2007.

The Government has dragged its feet on this issue for far too long and has allocated no funding for it in the 2007-08 Budget.

If the Government finally commits to a full study before the election, Labor will fully support them. However, if they continue to refuse to commit, the Veterans' community will at least know that such a study will proceed under a Labor Government.

## Operation Aussies Home

A team of dedicated Veterans, led by former Lieutenant Colonel Jim Bourke, has successfully found and repatriated the remains of two comrades, Lance Corporal 'Tiny' Richard Parker and Private Peter Gillson of 1RAR. Both men died in action in Vietnam in November 1965. Due to intense enemy fire, Australian troops were unable to retrieve their bodies at that time.

A handing over ceremony was held in Hanoi on June 4 and a ceremony with full military honours was held at RAAF Base Richmond on June 6.

Labor congratulates Operation Aussies Home, pays tribute to their determined work and also welcomes the financial assistance provided by the Federal Government to ensure the safe



return of Lance Corporal Parker and Private Gillson.

Jim Bourke has signalled his continuing determination to find four remaining Australians missing in action from the Vietnam War.

*Operation Aussies Home search team at the grave site in Bien Hoa Province, South Vietnam. (From L to R) Jim Bourke, David Thomas, Peter Aylett, Jeff Wullaert, Walter Pearson and Ray Latimer .*

*Photo Courtesy: Walter Pearson*

# Labor will Boost Funds for Suicide Prevention Program

At the Queensland RSL Congress, Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin announced a Rudd Labor Government will implement reforms and increase financial assistance to the Applied Suicide and Intervention Skills Training Program (ASIST), currently utilised by the Department.

Labor will provide an extra \$1 million over four years to programs aimed at preventing suicides by military Veterans. This will support

a range of reforms to service provision in this area, including:

- Greater promotion of ASIST through an increase in its advertising and marketing budget.
- More information and training sessions to be held in rural and regional areas.
- Increased financial assistance for participants in order to encourage higher participation.
- An expansion of the suite of programs to be offered by ASIST trainers.

To help facilitate these reforms, and to ensure the long term viability of this program, Labor will bring the ASIST program formally under the control of the VVCS.

The governance of the program will remain independent of the Department and under the control and direction of the Veterans' Community through the stewardship of the VVCS National Advisory Committee. These reforms will expand a worthwhile program that has been under resourced for far too long.

The Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) provides free and confidential counselling services for Veterans, Peacekeepers and their families. VVCS staff are professionally qualified psychologists or social workers with experience in working with the Veterans community.

**VVCS can be contacted  
24 hours a day on  
1800 011 046.**

You may also consider contacting;

- **Lifeline**  
13 11 14
- **SANE Australia  
Helpline**  
1800 187 263
- **Mensline Australia**  
1300 78 99 78



## Suicide and the Veterans' Community

Labor has expressed concern about the problem of suicide within the Veteran's community and their families. At the recent Estimates hearings Labor learnt of some of the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of a young SAS soldier upon his return from Afghanistan.

In response to a question on notice from Labor, the Department revealed at least 31 Veterans have committed suicide as a result of their service over the past five years.

This is a sad and tragic statistic. However, this is far from the whole story. The Department made the point that they do not include those on the Special Rate TPI pension or Veterans waiting for their claims to be processed in these figures. This is very concerning as these two groups would be at high risk of suicide, suggesting that the number of Veterans who have committed suicide may be many more.

These statistics also do not include members of the broader ex-service community who have no qualifying service and have committed suicide. No qualifying service does not mean no problems.

We know that families also suffer. Children of Vietnam Veterans are known to have a suicide rate three times higher than other children.

Suicide is an important issue for the Veterans' community. To overcome this we must be proactive. We cannot sit back and wait for people to self report. We cannot expect that everyone with a problem will be forthcoming in asking for help.

That is why we need to equip the Veterans' community with the skills to identify and deal with people who may be on the long road to despair and need our help. The time for action is now.

# Labor's National Conference Outlines Policy Directions for Veterans' Affairs



Photo by: Sean Daney

*Federal Labor Leader, Kevin Rudd addresses the 44th ALP National Conference in Sydney.*

**The Labor Party held its National Conference on 27-29 April 2007 to debate and deliver its platform for the 2007 election.**

Alan Griffin moved the following motion as part of the policy platform for Veterans' Affairs based on research and consultation with the Veterans' community.

The platform was unanimously endorsed by the Conference and contained the six pillars of action as outlined below:

## **Motion (passed unanimously by 44th ALP National Conference):**

This conference calls on Labor to focus its Veterans' Affairs policy on:

### ● **Restoring the value of compensation**

Labor acknowledges the widespread concern in the Veteran community at the erosion of the value of compensation payments, especially those affecting our most severely disabled war Veterans.

Compensation payments are made in recognition of our Veterans who, as a result of their service, are now left with severe physical or mental afflictions. This is one way in which our society can try to repay them for their sacrifice. Labor believes it is imperative that the value of these payments is not allowed to further erode.

### ● **Healing our Veterans both physically and mentally**

It is well known that many Veterans suffer from a range of physical and mental afflictions as a result of their service.

There is an obligation on Governments to ensure that we provide the very best health and rehabilitation services for our Veterans. Our focus should not just be on reactive treatments but also preventative actions and proactive outreach programs.

### ● **Caring for the families of Veterans**

The role of a Veteran's family in providing Veterans with love, support and care can not be underestimated. It should also be acknowledged that often a Veteran's service can impact negatively on his or her family, including sadly upon their health.

We need to investigate the effects of a Veteran's service on their families so we can design the most appropriate responses and programs to assist them. We need quick and effective action in this area.

### ● **Empowering the Veteran community**

Governments can never truly understand the nature of a Veteran's sacrifice. Therefore we must have effective processes and infrastructure in place to allow the Veteran community to communicate their needs to Government in a representative and independent manner.

The Veteran community should be able to communicate through representation on departmental committees and should be broadly consulted on controversial or important decisions that impact upon them.

We affirm our support for the independence of the VVCS and its governing body the National Advisory Committee. We believe that this body must be representative of all sections of the Veteran community whilst maintaining its independence from the Department.

### ● **Improving the operation of the Department**

While recognising that the Department of Veterans' Affairs is world class there is always room for improvement. Expanding claims processing times and backlogs must urgently be addressed by the Department. The Department must deal with claims in a timely and efficient way. Claims processing should pay due regard to the unique circumstances and challenges that many Veterans and their families face.

### ● **Recognising courage and sacrifice**

Australia owes a large debt to our fighting men and women. We must strive to ensure that we recognise their courage and sacrifice in an appropriate manner.

Where there have been deeds of great courage and sacrifice Labor will not neglect its duty to promote appropriate recognition. Labor will also strive to protect the heritage of foreign battlefields where our troops have lost their lives in recognition of their ultimate sacrifice.

# Federal Budget Round-Up

**Federal Labor welcomes the new funding commitments announced in the 2007-08 Budget, and congratulates the Government on some aspects of the budget which address a number of long standing issues in the Veterans' community.**

However, the Budget did not address key problems that have persisted during 11 years of the Howard Government. The Government did not address the problem of erosion of the Above General Rate Disability pensions. There were no new initiatives on Veterans' mental health, no money has been allocated for a health study into children of Vietnam Veterans, and there has been a reduction in staff levels in the Department for the third year in a row.

While the Department's Budget has been increasing, much of the new expenditure announced by the Minister belatedly addresses long standing problems, or is due to natural increases in demand and service costs. For example, the \$640 million announced in 2006 for the Gold Card addressed observations by Veterans, their representatives, medical practitioners and also the Labor Party, that the Gold Card was chronically under-funded. There had been no significant initiatives to boost most specialist fees in a decade.



## **Catch up Payments**

Catch up payments of \$50 and \$25 per fortnight respectively for Special and Intermediate Rate Veterans' Disability Pensions. This is welcome, but fails to address the underlying issue of long term erosion. It also neglects Extreme Disablement Adjustment Pension recipients. A Labor Government would index these pensions to rises in the cost and the standard of living.

## **Increase in Funeral Benefit**

A doubling of funeral benefits provided under the Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986, from \$1,000 to \$2,000. This is a step in the right direction, but still leaves this benefit behind the funeral benefit under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004.

## **Additional Support for Carers**

An increase in the hourly fee for in-home respite care services from \$29.20 to \$34.03 per hour, effective from 1 July 2007, as well as a small provision for community and ex-service organisations (\$5 million over four years) to support volunteers and carers.

## **European POW Ex-Gratia Payment**

This will provide European POWs or their widows with one-off \$25,000 payments in line with Japanese and Korean POWs. The Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Mr Alan Griffin, has congratulated the Minister on his advocacy for European POWs.

## **A Longer Backdating Period for War Widows**

This initiative will provide three additional months for war widows who claim a War Widows Pension to receive a backdated pension. This is a worthwhile reform, and is supported by Labor.

# Senate Estimates – May 2007

**Senate Estimates provides a rare opportunity to question the Government's handling of Veterans' issues. Unfortunately, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs has shown little respect for these processes, preferring to play clever political games. Questions on notice from February Estimates were due on 29 March but were not received from the Minister until 28 May. The next round of questions from the May hearings are due on 26 July. Labor calls upon the Minister to ensure that responses to questions on notice are provided in a timely manner.**

## Writeway

It has been revealed that Writeway Research Services will be subject to legal proceedings in Queensland due to alleged breaches of the Queensland Security Providers Act 1993.

When asked at Estimates, the Department confirmed that in spite of this it had recently renewed the contract with Writeway, along with two other research companies, to provide historical research services.

During legal proceedings, Departmental Officers will undertake historical research and an urgent review is being conducted of Queensland cases involving Writeway.

## Veterans' Home Care

Labor expressed concern about complaints it has received from some Veterans regarding their Home Care services having been downgraded.

In Estimates, the Government admitted that while it was aware of complaints regarding transition arrangements, it did not know whether there had been any changes to the level of services Veterans received or to the co-payments they pay. Further information will be provided by the department.

## Superannuation

There has been inconsistent information about the Superannuation regulations that commence on 1 July 2007. On 10 April, the Government said that the reforms would not change the benefit options available to DFRDB members or the tax treatment of their commuted lump sums.

However, at Estimates, Treasury stated that changes to the tax treatment of superannuation would apply to military superannuation members. This could mean that Veterans who retire early pay more tax, or that those who transferred from DFRDB to MSBS are disadvantaged. Labor urges the Government to guarantee that Veterans will not be worse off under the changes.

## Desmond Kelly

DVA provided an update on the case of Desmond Kelly, who was charged under the Crimes Act on suspicion of leaking information about the Government's response to the Clarke review. His suspension with pay was changed to suspension without pay, and this continued for more than two years. When found innocent, Mr Kelly's pay was reinstated. The Department repaid his lost superannuation benefits, but did not back pay his salary for that period. At Estimates

the Department revealed that, once acquitted, it advised Mr Kelly and his legal representative that a Code of Conduct Inquiry would be held with a lower burden of proof, and that he could be liable for serious penalties. The Department insisted this was not coercive behaviour but standard process. When Mr Kelly resigned on 24 February 2007, the Department withdrew the inquiry. The Department continues to maintain that there was "no basis" on which to repay Mr Kelly's lost salary, even though it repaid his lost superannuation.



*Headlines from newspapers across Australia after it was revealed that charges would be laid against Desmond Kelly and two Herald Sun Journalists following the leaking of the then Minister's Danna Vale's meek response to the Clarke Review.*

## ANZAC Day 2007



Federal Labor Leader Kevin Rudd lays a wreath and reflects at the Stone of Remembrance in Canberra on ANZAC Day.

Photo Courtesy: Australian War Memorial

ANZAC Day is the most important day of the calendar year for the Veterans' community. It is when the nation honours our Veterans and collectively remembers those who died in conflict.

This year's ANZAC Day commemorated 92 years since the

first ANZAC Day. Record crowds confirmed that the courage and sacrifice of our Veterans' community is firmly entrenched in the hearts and minds of Australians. The trend towards increasing numbers of young attendees also continued.

Approximately 28,000 people gathered at the Australian War Memorial's Stone of Remembrance in Canberra including Federal Labor Leader Kevin Rudd. In Melbourne, it was reported that 35,000 people attended the dawn service, topping last year's record crowd. RSL Sub Branches also reported some of their best ever attendance numbers, with up to 3000 people attending some suburban ANZAC Day dawn services.

## Kokoda Track

In the last edition of this newsletter, it was reported that Kevin Rudd had announced that a Labor Government would campaign at the United Nations to place the Kokoda Track on UNESCO's official world heritage list, to ensure its protection for future generations and preserve its unique place in Australia's military history.

Labor raised this issue numerous times last year in response to community concern that without long term protection, the Kokoda Track is vulnerable to the impact of mining and logging.

Labor welcomes recent media reports that the Howard Government is finally taking the protection of the Kokoda Track seriously. On 17 May 2007 it was reported that the Foreign Minister had suggested to the Papua

New Guinean Government that the Kokoda Track be made an Australian heritage destination on par with Gallipoli.

The Government should now confirm whether the Foreign Minister's announcement means that they support Kevin Rudd's full policy to seek UNESCO protection for the Kokoda Track and that it will seek to avoid the same errors and mismanagement that occurred in respect of the works and maintenance of Anzac Cove in Gallipoli.



## Notices

Bert Nicholson, Leader of the Scottish Veterans in Victoria, would like to draw attention to the fact that the Scottish Veterans are getting low in numbers, and would like any ex-Scots or next of kin to please get in touch with him. Bert can be contacted on (03) 5961 5959, or via email at [bertnicholson@iprimus.com.au](mailto:bertnicholson@iprimus.com.au)

Remember to check out Alan Griffin's Veterans Affairs website at [www.griffinmp.com](http://www.griffinmp.com). On the site you will find copies of Alan's speeches, newsletters, press releases, information kits and community notices.



If you would like Alan Griffin to attend and/or speak at one of your functions please forward details to the Office of Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 or contact Alan at [www.griffinmp.com](http://www.griffinmp.com).

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