



27th February 2019

Veterans Compensation and Rehabilitation inquiry

Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2604

Response to Draft Productivity Commission Report – A Better Way to Support Veterans

Introduction:

The Legacy Club of Brisbane Limited (Legacy Brisbane) was founded in 1928 and it has been nearly a century since the heartfelt vow was made that began Legacy. In World War 1 a digger promised his dying mate to look after the missus and kids. Legacy Brisbane has ensured that commitment is being kept by hundreds of generous people who support Legacy's lifelong promise of care for the **families** of those brave Australians who have given their life or health during or after service to their country.

Legacy Brisbane has five core client groups - aging widow/ers, young families, youth, people with a disability and defence families who are helped by over 350 Legatees who believe in what we do, across three regions in Queensland (South East Queensland and Central Queensland) and split into 14 contact groups.

Legacy Brisbane assists over **7,500 widow/ers and families and 250 children and people living with a disability**. Legacy Brisbane does this through programs that protect the basic needs of individuals and families, advocate for their entitlements and benefits, support them through bereavement and enable them to thrive despite their adversity and loss.

Recommendations and Comments:

Legacy Brisbane fully supports the response submitted to this Productivity Commission by Legacy Australia Incorporated, but would like to raise the following points in addition:

1. War Widow and Dependant Gold Cards

Legacy Brisbane is strongly opposed to Draft Recommendation 15.1. Legacy Brisbane believes that all spouses who are over 65 years of age, and are married to a veteran who has obtained the gold card either via operational service or due to their accepted disabilities, should automatically be granted the Gold Card on the death of the veteran. This is to recognise the sacrifice spouses of

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Trading name of Legacy Club of Brisbane Ltd ACN: 608 208 631 ABN: 51 157 944 951

PO Box 3003, South Brisbane QLD 4101
41 Merivale Street, South Brisbane QLD 4101
Phone: (07) 3029 5600 Fax: (07) 3846 2093
Email: admin@legacybrisbane.org.au
Web: www.legacy.com.au

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veterans have had to make over the years in supporting their veteran through their ill health, often at the expense of their own health.

Legacy Brisbane is of the belief that the financial cost to the government for granting such an entitlement to a widow or dependant would not be a large burden. Particularly, when it would be offset by significant reductions in the administrative costs currently associated with processing War Widows Pension Applications, any subsequent VRB reviews and AAT appeals.

2. Families of Deceased Veterans Entitlements and Service Provision

It has been noted throughout this Draft Report that families and dependants of deceased veterans are rarely discussed and most of the recommendations throughout the report have quite significant implications on this client population.

It is the belief of Legacy Brisbane that this report needs to be rewritten with all DVA client groups in mind (including widow/ers, children, and other significant dependants) and recommendations made from a holistic point of view, not just a veteran-centric view.

3. Families of Incapacitated Veterans Entitlements and Service Provision

As stated above, Legacy Brisbane has also noted that the Draft Recommendations have not discussed the special needs of incapacitated veterans and especially not their families who are the most significant support structure that these veterans have.

The Draft Recommendations seem to be taking significant service provision and entitlements away from veterans and especially from their families. This will continue to add undue stress onto these people and ex-service organisations who are struggling to cope with the demand on them already.

Charities, like Legacy Brisbane, are already stretched but have increased service provision to support the families of incapacitated veterans, as well as the traditional client groups of widow/ers and dependants, due to the issues these groups are having obtaining appropriate entitlements and advocacy surrounding significant health and welfare related issues.

4. Contribution made by volunteers to the care of veterans and veterans' families

It is noted that the Commissioners have deferred assessment of the role of Ex Service Organisations (ESOs) pending their consideration of the report by Mr Robert Cornall AO into Veterans' Advocacy and Support Services. *(page 35 of PC Overview report)*

This recommendation is focused on the contribution made by volunteers to the care of veterans and veterans' families.

Given that our clients are the widows, widowers and families of deceased and incapacitated veterans, Legacy Brisbane is not strictly an ESO. Nonetheless we are part of the veteran community in Queensland, where we rely on 300 volunteers to provide support over 6,000 clients. Our clients are primarily the widows, widowers and children of veterans and some of our volunteers continue to serve in Australia's military forces.

In metropolitan areas, the volunteer to client ratio is approximately 1:19. In contrast, the ratio nears 1:60 in the rural and regional areas serviced by Legacy Brisbane, including for example, Rockhampton and Gladstone, and shortly Maryborough and Hervey Bay.

Our volunteer workforce is aging, with two-thirds of our volunteers over the age of 65 years. Our service delivery in support of veterans' families may not be sustainable if we are to continue to rely on this cohort of older volunteers.

Yet the training and support of relatively younger volunteers, particularly in rural and regional areas, is hampered by a lack of funding. The importance of training and support is highlighted by Volunteering Australia, with its *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* indicating that:

Standard 5.3:- Volunteers' knowledge and skill needs relevant to their roles are identified, and training and development opportunities are provided to meet these needs.

Funding shortfalls can in part be attributed to the inequitable nature of the *Building Excellence in Support & Training (BEST)* Grants administered by DVA. These grants are provided for the "welfare" and "pension" work undertaken by an ESO.

Workload ratings are used to calculate the quantum of a BEST Grant, with "welfare" work given a rating of 0.25 per hour, whereas the ratings for "pension" work vary from 1.0 to 20.0 per hour.

Most of the work undertaken by Legacy volunteers and the related training effort is related to "welfare" support. This can vary from:

- a simple visit to a client's home or place of residence; to
- hospital visits, where the hospital will generally require the volunteer to undergo orientation training over and above that provided by Legacy; to
- the planning and conduct of group activities and events for widows and children, wherein people of similar (disadvantaged) backgrounds come together to assist in alleviating social isolation;
- more complex arrangements for "end-of-life" planning, including for example, assistance with "enduring powers of attorney", "advance health care directives", wills and for our younger widows, guardianship arrangements for children; to
- co-ordination of arrangements for a widow's transition from independent living to a supported care environment.

The increasing complexity of "welfare" support, especially to older persons, warrants not only a graduated system of workload ratings, which mirror the ratings used for "pension" work but equally important, direct funding support by Government of our regional offices.

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Concurrently, barriers to individuals volunteering, especially younger persons, need to be removed. At present, the *Advocacy Training and Development Program* administered by DVA represents a major barrier. The evolution of ATDP has been piecemeal; much to the chagrin of volunteers who wish to complete the training but are concerned that ATDP requirements continue to expand and are not always relevant to Legacy’s “welfare” work.

Indeed in relation to the welfare of older widows, the ATDP seems to be an anathema, far removed from the Training and Information Program (TIP) previously delivered to Legacy Brisbane volunteers. The devolution of training responsibilities to individual ESOs and consequent accreditation and funding of an ESO’s training programs would reduce barriers to volunteering.

In relation to the 52% of DVA clients who are widows or dependants over the age of 79 years, a policy shift of this nature would be consistent with previous findings of the Productivity Commission, specifically those in the Commission’s *Report (2011) into Caring for Older Australians*, as shown in the following extract from the Summary of Proposals.

Extract from Summary of Proposals in Productivity Commission Inquiry Report: Caring for Older Australians Inquiry Report (Inquiry Report released 8 August 2011)Current problem	Proposed reform	Main benefits of change
<p><i>Improving conditions for volunteers</i></p>		
<p>Organisations face significant costs associated with organising, training and managing volunteers.</p> <p>Activities can impose substantial costs on volunteers.</p>	<p>Funding for services which engage volunteers should take into account the costs associated with: volunteer administration and regulation; and appropriate training and support for volunteers.</p>	<p>Reduce barriers to individuals volunteering and improve organisations’ ability to harness volunteers.</p>



Source: <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-summary-proposals.pdf>

Legacy Brisbane recommends that the Productivity Commission reports on the measures, including funding, that DVA could adopt in improving conditions for volunteers, as proposed by the Productivity Commission in its 2011 report into *Caring for Older Australians*.

Conclusion:

The Legacy Club of Brisbane Limited strongly supports the response to this report submitted by Legacy Australia Incorporated, but would like the above mentioned points to be also addressed by the report. Further work is needed surrounding the supports, services and entitlements that **families** of deceased and incapacitated veterans receive from the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Especially, on how each of these government departments can ensure a holistic, proactive approach to the service and support provisions available to these vulnerable clients.

Legatee Mal Rerden
President

Legacy Brisbane

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