

Kim Beazley's Plan for Veterans

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Overview

It is important that we Australians ensure that the service and sacrifice of our veterans is remembered and recognized. Labor will honour the promises made by previous governments to support and recognize our veterans and the contribution made by their partners and families through a system of commemoration, compensation, health care, aged care and housing assistance.

Labor has clear objectives for veterans' policy, which have evolved from listening to and consulting with members of the veteran community. Our initiatives and objectives address many important issues within the veteran community and a future Labor Government will seek a fruitful and significant relationship with all ex-service organisations.

The Australian community is continually evolving and it is important to ensure there is an ongoing commitment to commemorating and recognizing the sacrifice and service of our veterans and the important part they have played in shaping the Australian character. Therefore a Labor Government would continue, and where appropriate expand, both the commemorative and educational side of the portfolio.

The repatriation system is vital to the veteran community and a Labor Government will continue to improve the system to both identify and remove anomalies in the system, to ensure the system is up to date with our changing society and provides optimum service for our veterans.

In government, Labor will have as one of its highest Veterans' Affairs priorities a need to prepare for the consequences of an aging Veterans' community. Our policies launched today are part of that preparation.

THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT'S FAILURES

Labor believes that Veterans' Affairs should be treated with a high level of bi-partisanship. However, there are a number of serious frustrations within the veteran community, which have not been addressed by the present Government. The Howard Government has presided over a disconnected mix of policy decisions. The Government has approached the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio, budget by budget, with little policy cohesion or logic. It has failed to address the needs of veterans on a holistic basis and has provided no clear direction.

The Howard Government has not addressed:

- The income test treatment of Disability Pensions by Social Security;
- The need to rectify medal anomalies; and
- The serious concerns regarding the T&PI or Special Rate.

The Howard Government has:

- Reduced the Department of Veterans' Affairs through cutting staff numbers and outsourcing services;
- Failed to recognize the impact of the GST on veterans;
- Made it harder to access legal aid;
- Failed to address the concerns raised over the process of review through the Veterans' Review Board and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal; and
- Reduced the quality of aged care in Australia.

The Howard Government has failed to address the major concern in the veteran community; that veterans without qualifying service have their DVA pension assessed as income when applying for a Social Security Benefit. Since 1996, the Howard Government has continually promised the veteran community that this issue was their highest priority and yet have totally failed to deliver. This assets test affects those ex-service personnel most in need of the assistance. The Howard Government has ignored their policy commitment and on several occasions has refused to accept amendments moved by the Labor Party in Parliament, to correct this injustice.

The Special Rate or T&PI has been of considerable concern for many veterans and yet the Government has completely failed to address the problem. The Howard Government's lack of action has caused friction within the ex-service community. This Government has failed to acknowledge the fact that there are many T&PI Veterans with a less than adequate standard of living. The Howard Government have no vision and no solution for this group of veterans who have rallied and lobbied and discussed their concerns for well over three years.

Along with failing to address these anomalies within the veteran community, the Howard Government has jeopardized the quality of service provided by the Department of Veterans' Affairs by reducing staff and continuing to outsource various services.

The review process available to veterans - including internal review, the Veterans' Review Board and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal - is increasingly complex and the Government has failed to rectify this situation. There is a need to ensure that veterans receive accurate advice on how to correctly use their rights of appeal. In particular the review process has been compromised with the cutback of legal aid.

Kim Beazley's Plan for Veterans

Labor proposes a set of principles to deal with Veterans Affairs on a more holistic level than the present Government. During the last three years Labor has consulted widely with the veteran community to ensure that our proposals are effective and well targeted. We aim to encompass a range of initiatives and ideas, which will improve the overall living standards and lifestyle of our veterans.

ANZAC DAY

Labor will be committed to maintaining ANZAC Day as the national day of commemoration for veterans. We do not support it being used for any other celebratory use. It is important that this is a day used to remember and honour those who lost their lives in serving our nation. ANZAC Day will remain our commemorative day for veterans under Labor.

RETAINING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Labor is committed to retaining a separate administrative entity for all veteran benefits and entitlements. It is important that the needs of veterans, their partners and families continue to be dealt with by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The maintenance of a separate Department of Veterans' Affairs within the Defence Portfolio is Labor policy. It will be a priority to improve the advisory services of the Department to ensure veterans and their families understand what benefits they are eligible to receive.

EXTENSION OF THE GOLD CARD

Labor will extend the Gold Card to all Australian Veterans with qualifying service who are over 70 years old, regardless of where and when they served.

This means that all veterans from all areas with qualifying service will now be eligible for the Gold Card, on reaching 70. This means that, for example, Korean, Vietnam, Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation Veterans will now be eligible for this benefit. By this initiative, the current discriminatory policy restricting the Gold Card to eligible veterans of World War I and II will be removed.

It is Labor's belief that those who put their lives at risk to fight for this nation should have free access to optimum health care.

REVIEWS

Labor will conduct a two part independent review.

The first aspect will be a **review of the T&PI and the EDA** (Extreme Disablement Adjustment) pensions.

During the last three years, it has become increasingly obvious that the rate of both the T&PI and EDA compensation pensions are of concern in the veteran community.

Labor's Independent Review will include representatives from the veteran community and will seek submissions, hold public hearings and the report will be tabled in Parliament. Labor believes that an Independent Review is the most appropriate way to investigate the concerns of veterans and to reach a solution acceptable to the entire veteran community.

The Independent Review will address, among other issues:

- Disability Pensions being counted as income for Social Security. This is an anomaly that affects T&PI veterans in large numbers and especially younger T&PI veterans with dependants;
- The form of indexation;
- An appropriate level for the rate of the T&PI and the EDA; and
- The possibility of a supplementary payment to help those T&PI and EDA veterans most in need of assistance

The second aspect of the Independent Review will consider issues relating to **qualifying service for particular groups of Veterans** including some World War II Veterans without qualifying service, Veterans of the British Occupational Force of Japan, participants of British atomic testing in Australia and servicemen engaged in counter terrorist and special recovery training.

HEALTH STUDIES

There are currently a number of important health studies of our veterans being conducted, including those of the Gulf War Veterans and those involved in the British Atomic Bomb testing. Labor will recognize these health studies so long as they are objective and thoroughly researched. The health studies of our veterans are extremely important to Labor and there is an obligation for Governments to react appropriately and without delay to these studies. The completion of these tests will see Labor commit itself to an appropriate response.

Labor is dedicated to implementing the recommendations of previous health studies, particularly those studies of Vietnam Veterans and their children. Labor will develop an integrated plan to ensure a variety of services are available to these veterans and their families.

HEALTH STUDY OF SAS VETERANS

SAS veterans and their representative organisations argue that the extremely dangerous and hazardous training that SAS members undertake and its effects are unique.

Recognising the pressures on SA members and Veterans, Labor will establish an inquiry into the health, needs and circumstances of former members of the SAS, in particular those who served with the CTSR teams, to identify the long-term effects of that service.

FUNERAL BENEFIT

The amount of the funeral benefit has been increased only slightly since 1984 from \$550 to \$574. Labor would examine this level to ensure all veterans are laid to rest with the dignity and respect they deserve.

GST-FREE FUNERALS

All Veterans and their families will benefit from Labor's decision to make funeral services and pre-paid funerals GST free.

Imposing a GST on funeral expenses is an unfair burden on Australian families, especially the elderly. It is John Howard's death tax. It is a terrible time in any family when someone loses a life partner or other family member. It's particularly tough on older Australians. The last thing they need is a tax bill.

Labor will get rid of John Howard's death tax by taking the GST off funeral services, including pre-paid funerals. This measure will commence on 1 January 2003.

Labor will also refund the GST already paid on pre-paid funerals where the service has not been delivered before the GST is removed from funerals.

AUSTRALIAN CIVILIAN SURGICAL AND MEDICAL TEAMS VIETNAM

Labor previously accepted the recommendations of the Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in respect of South-East Asian Service and in Government would ensure they are carried out.

Therefore, Labor will reconsider the Government's rejection of the recommendation to award the Civilian Surgical and Medical Teams repatriation benefits.

MEDALS

Labor supported the announcement of a National Service Medal earlier this year.

However, Labor wants to ensure that the introduction of this medal does not compromise or conflict with any other medal or award. Labor is aware that the introduction of this medal has caused some concern in parts of the veteran community. Therefore, Labor would consider all submissions regarding a Defence Service Medal designed to recognize those who volunteered or were permanent members of the Defence Forces.

COMMEMORATION

The honouring of our veterans will continue as a cornerstone of Labor's Veterans' Affairs policy.

Commemorative activities and events, which are an important element of the portfolio, will continue with expansions into new areas wherever necessary. Labor is aware that the service and sacrifice of our veterans has done much to create our national identity. Labor will continue with projects that the present Government has already committed to and developed.

We will ensure that future generations continue to learn and appreciate the deeds and sacrifice of their forbears through an enhanced educational program. In this spirit of commemoration, Labor will posthumously award the Victoria Cross of Australia to three war heroes.

VCs will be awarded to Gunner Albert Cleary, Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean and Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick in recognition of their outstanding bravery and valour. The gallantry and courage of these three men is an inspiration to Australians of all generations.

Gunner Albert Cleary reminds us all of the appalling deaths at Sandakan in North Borneo in 1945. Cleary attempted to escape from the death march and was tortured to death over ten horrific days. He bore his treatment with outstanding courage and bravery. Awarding him a VC is also recognition of the bravery of the 1,700 Australians killed in these appalling conditions by the Japanese Imperial Army.

Ordinary Seaman Sheean will be the first member of the Royal Australian Navy to receive a VC. Sheean was a Seaman on the HMAS Armidale in 1942 when Japanese planes attacked it with gunfire. As the ship was sinking, Sheean strapped himself to a gun mount to defend his mates being fired at while trying to

escape. Despite serious injuries he continued to fire as water engulfed him at his mount. It was an act of selfless heroism.

The story of Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick is perhaps one of the most famous from the First World War and yet has not been suitably recognized with Military decoration. At Gallipoli in 1915, Simpson commandeered a donkey and began to remove wounded soldiers, despite being under enemy fire. It has been said that he rescued nearly 300 soldiers in 24 days. Simpson was killed during one of his missions.

These three men exemplify the bravery of Australians at war and Labor will recognize these soldiers with posthumous VCs. This will be a further opportunity to commemorate and highlight the outstanding valour and service of those who defended our nation.

Kim Beazley's Plan for Aged Care for Veterans

BETTER COMMUNITY CARE

Labor is committed to supporting the health and care needs of older Australians, including Veterans and their families, who continue to live in the community. We understand that most older people want to stay in their own home for as long as possible, and respect their preference for community-based care. However, we also understand that this vital part of our caring infrastructure is too complex and fragmented. It places enormous organisational strain on older people and their families at an already stressful time.

Labor will better integrate the complex amalgam of primary, acute and community care services, which currently meet the medical and care needs of the frail aged.

We will build a flexible and integrated network of care services, which can respond to the diverse and changing support needs of older Australians. Labor's community care model will support the preference of older people to remain at home, and make life easier for those coordinating their care.

Veterans will benefit from the continuation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs HACC scheme and the Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs).

Labor's community care system will enable older people, families and carers, and Veterans to access the care they need with ease and confidence. It is a care-centred system that will enable older Australians to remain in their homes and communities, with increased independence and greater control over their lives.

PUTTING THE 'CARE' BACK INTO AGED CARE

Labor has made a \$467 million commitment to address the current crisis in aged care. We have made aged care a priority because we believe older Australians have a right to be cared for with respect and dignity.

Labor argues that how we care for our elderly and our Veterans says much about the society we are. Sadly, the Howard's Government's aged care system has failed older Australians and placed families and public hospitals under immense pressure. Bronwyn Bishop's legacy is a national shortage of more than 12,000 aged care beds, longer waiting lists, fewer nurses and real cuts to care funding. Labor's Plan for Aged Care will tackle these problems head on.

Labor's first priority is to deliver the nursing home beds that the frail aged on waiting lists urgently need. Our Plan includes \$200 million in interest free loans to get new beds built in areas where there is a bed shortage. Loans will also be

available to refurbish existing facilities where closure would leave a community short of beds. Priority will be given to proposals that cater for the special care needs of residents with dementia.

It is one thing to make sure that the frail aged can access the care they need, but we must also ensure that the care provided is of the highest quality. Inadequate care funding under the Howard Government has made the provision of quality care 'unviable' for many facilities and the aged care sector is struggling to attract and maintain qualified staff.

Australia's Veterans will also benefit from Labor's decision to increase care funding by \$180 million over four years to guarantee high quality care for our frail aged and stop our nurses leaving. In the longer term, Labor will develop and implement a National Benchmark of Care to directly link the level of care subsidies to the cost of providing quality care. The Benchmark will set clear standards for the level and quality of care to be delivered to all older Australians living in nursing homes.

As part of our Benchmark of Care, Labor will introduce minimum staffing guidelines. Understaffing in the Howard Government's aged care system has left residents waiting longer and longer to be toileted, bathed and fed. It has meant that nurses and care staff are forced to rush from person to person with no time for a chat or a cup of tea. Labor says this is not good enough. Labor's minimum staffing guidelines will ensure that on every shift, in every nursing home, there are enough qualified staff with the time to deliver the care our elderly need and deserve.

Labor takes our responsibility to regulate and monitor the care of elderly residents very seriously. Most are frail and suffer from some form of dementia. Many are unable to express their care needs or voice their concerns. To ensure that residents receive quality care and that their rights are at all times protected, Labor will guarantee annual surprise inspections of all nursing homes and hostels, impose tougher sanctions on sub-standard providers and appoint an Aged Care Ombudsman.

Kim Beazley's Plan for Dental Health

Labor's National Dental Health Scheme will benefit both Veterans and their families.

Labor will continue to provide dental health services for veterans and this will be unchanged under the National Dental Health Scheme. Approximately 300,000 veterans are entitled to full dental care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The DVA Dental Scheme is mainly delivered by the private sector and present arrangements will continue.

For the general community, access to good dental services is a central concern but under John Howard that access has been slashed.

Veterans' families may benefit directly from Labor's plan to restore dental services to those most in need. Labor will spend \$100 million over the next four years on a new National Dental Health Scheme for non-veteran, low-income Australians.

Labor will provide the States and Territories with additional funding to cut waiting times for the 4.3 million Australians covered by a Health Care Card or a Pensioner Concession Card to gain access to:

- Emergency care;
- Regular check up and treatment services, which will be available from public and private dentists; and
- Prompt low cost denture repairs and new dentures.

In addition, Labor will also provide improved dental services to residents in nursing homes.

Rolling Back the GST For Veterans

Labor will make the GST fairer for Veterans and their families by taking it off some essential goods and services. This includes taking the GST off:

- household electricity and gas supply;
- funeral services and pre-paid funerals; and
- long-term caravan park and boarding house rentals;

These measures amount to a \$1 billion a year GST tax cut for all Australians - a billion dollar commitment to making the GST fairer.

Taking the GST off some of life's essentials is permanent. Once the GST comes off, it will never be put back on. Nor will it be eroded by inflation and disappear in the way that John Howard's so-called tax cuts have.

A GST tax cut is a tax cut that grows - its value increases over time as the cost of goods and services increase.

And unlike John Howard's 'tax cuts', everyone benefits from Labor's plan.

LABOR'S FOUR-PART GST GUARANTEE

Kim Beazley has also given the following guarantee to Australia's Veterans:

- Labor will make the GST fairer, without making it more complex
- Labor will not increase the rate of the GST
- Labor will not put the GST on anything it is not on now
- Labor will make the GST simpler for small business

Home Equity Conversion Loans

Labor - in partnership with the financial institutions - will allow older Australians, including eligible Veterans aged over 60, to borrow against their home without having to make regular repayments. People aged between 60 and 75 will be able to borrow between \$4,000 and \$6,000, while those aged over 75 can borrow between \$4,000 and \$8,500.

For many older Veterans, their home is their only asset. A loan may be needed to cover day-to-day expenses or the cost of essential home repairs or maintenance. Sometimes people wish to prepay for a funeral by borrowing against their home.

Under Labor's *Home Equity Conversion Loan* Scheme, recipients will not have to repay capital or interest for the duration of the loan. The loan will only become repayable upon the death of the last borrower or when the home is sold.

Funding of \$12 million over three years will be provided to subsidise the loans and ensure that the administration costs for each applicant are nominal.

Costing

	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	Total
ANZAC Day	0	0	0	0	0
Retain Department of Veterans' Affairs	0	0	0	0	0
Extension of the Gold Card	0	15.7	17.8	20.0	53.5
Independent Review	0	0	0	0	0
Health Studies	0	0	0	0	0
Health study of SAS Veterans	0	0	0	0	0
Funeral benefit	0	0	0	0	0
GST free funerals ¹	*	*	*	*	*
Australian Civilian Surgical & Medical Teams, Vietnam	0	0	0	0	0
Medals	0	0	0	0	0
Commemoration	0	0	0	0	0
Aged Care ²	*	*	*	*	*
Dental Scheme ³	10.0	10.0	30.0	50.0	100.0
Rolling Back the GST for Veterans ⁴	*	*	*	*	*
Home Equity Loans ⁵	0	5.0	5.0	5.0	15.0
TOTAL (millions) ⁶	0	15.7	17.8	20.0	53.5

1. This measure contained in ***Kim Beazley's Plan for a Fairer GST*** has a total cost of \$162 million over three years.
2. These measures were announced in ***Kim Beazley's Plan for Aged Care***, the total value of which is \$ 217 million over 4 years.
3. These measures were announced in ***Kim Beazley's Plan for Dental Health***.
4. These measures were announced in ***Kim Beazley's Plan for a Fairer GST***, the total value of which is \$2.2 billion over 3 years.
5. These measures were announced in ***Kim Beazley's Plan for Older Australians***.
6. The costing table above reflects the full value of ***Kim Beazley's Plan for Veterans***. The net impact on the Budget (\$m) is:

2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	Total
0	15.7	17.8	20.0	53.5