

COMPENSATION AND WELFARE



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REPATRIATION MEDICAL AUTHORITY

The following new or updated Statements of Principles (SOP's) have recently been issued by the RMA:

- systemic lupus erythematosus
- ischaemic heart disease
- deep vein thrombosis
- eating disorder
- personality disorder
- acquired cataract
- motor neurone disease

It is in your best interest that if a Disability Pension has been refused based on Factors from a superseded SOP that a new application be investigated. Please make contact with your Sub-Branch's Pension Officer for the latest information.

The RMA have also recently announced investigations into the following diseases:

- diabetes mellitus
- endometriosis
- hypopituitarism
- anxiety disorder
- depressive disorder
- Reiter's syndrome
- symptomatic Epstein-Barr virus infection
- psoriatic arthropathy
- renal artery atherosclerotic disease
- aortic aneurysm
- non-aneurysmal aortic atherosclerotic disease
- varicose veins of the lower limb
- angle-closure glaucoma
- open-angle glaucoma
- adhesive capsulitis of the shoulder
- cluster headache syndrome
- polycythaemia vera

Any Veteran may make a submission in writing to the RMA concerning these investigations if they have **"sound medical-scientific evidence" supporting their submission.** In

order to establish a consistent approach to the RMA, any veteran who believes that they have "sound medical-scientific evidence" is asked to contact the Vice President Southern Country, Dr Rod Bain on: 0417604450 to discuss your evidence. The following has been received from the Repatriation Medical Authority:

CATARACT SURGERY

From mid 2009 the Government intends to reduce the Medicare Rebate on cataract surgery. There is a possibility that this may flow through to the reimbursement levels provided by the Department of Veterans' Affairs to service providers providing cataract surgery for entitled veterans. The RSL has written to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs expressing great concern if there is to be an impact, seeking clarification on this point, and arguing that veterans should not be disadvantaged in terms of their access to ophthalmological services by such a move.

The Secretary has subsequently advised that the Government introduced changes do not result in an automatic reduction to fees paid by the Department of Veterans' Affairs for these procedures. The DVA fees for these procedures are set independent of the Medicare Benefits Schedule. Changes to the DVA's fees for surgery would only be undertaken after close consultation with the Australian Medical Association. Consequently, it is expected that veterans who are entitled to receive cataract surgery will still have the same level of access to Ophthalmic surgeons as they have enjoyed in the past.

ROBOTIC ASSISTED PROSTATECTOMY

The Primary Care Policy Group of the Department of Veterans' Affairs has received a number of requests for robotic assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy. In 2006, the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC - the body which advises the Government about items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule) evaluated the use of robotic assisted surgery compared to open radical prostatectomy in terms of safety, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

The MSAC review concluded that there was uncertainty about the comparative cost-effectiveness of robotic laparoscopic surgery as a shorter period of hospitalisation does not offset the additional costs involved. MSAC also noted that there was insufficient evidence on long-term outcomes compared to an open radical prostatectomy that is the remission rates associated with incomplete removal of the cancerous tissue. Open radical prostatectomy is still considered the "gold standard" for this type of procedure.

Consequently, DVA does not accept financial responsibility for robotic assisted surgery, whether requested by a doctor or hospital - except in rare cases where significant clinical evidence has been provided to support its use as the only viable treatment option. Any request for exceptional circumstances to support the funding of robotic surgery is considered on a case-by-case basis and should be submitted to DVA for approval prior to the surgery taking place.

This request must be made by the treating doctor. DVA will not fund robotic laparoscopic prostatectomy on the basis of veteran's or surgeon's personal preference for this procedure. If the robotic assisted surgery is provided without DVA approval - either not obtaining it or proceeding having been rejected by DVA - then DVA will only fund the surgery at the equivalent DVA fee for the open radical prostatectomy.

In terms of requests from hospitals, DVA will not fund requests for the same reasons outlined above.

DVA's decision in this matter reflects a Departmental position to fund the requested treatment. It is not a direction to the treating doctor on whether to undertake the surgery, which is clearly a medical judgement.

SECURE AND SUSTAINABLE PENSION REFORM PACKAGE

The 2009-10 Budget introduced pension system reforms to ensure secure and sustainable pensions.

Pensioners who receive the Veterans' Service Pension and Income Support Supplement will benefit from the increases to pension payments. Under

the new arrangements the Government will provide an additional:

- \$32.49 a week for single pensioners on the full pension
- \$10.14 a week for pensioner couples (combined) on a full pension.

This brings the single rate of pension up to two-thirds of the combined couple rate.

The payment of allowances to veterans' will be simplified. The Pharmaceutical Allowance and Telephone Allowance will be incorporated into a new Veterans' Health Care Supplement.

There will be two rates for the new Veterans' Health Care Supplement - \$156 per year where only one of either the Pharmaceutical Allowance or Telephone Allowance is received or \$312 per year to replace both allowances.

Those veterans' not entitled to receive the Service Pension because of the assets and income test, will be eligible for the higher rate of the Veterans' Health Care Supplement and from the 20th September 2009 the supplement will be paid fortnightly at a rate of \$12.00

A new benchmarking index called Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index will be introduced. There will now be a three tiered benchmarking system used to ensure that pension rates keep parity community living standards. From September not only will the pension be increased by the higher of the CPI or the new Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index. The benchmark for the single pension will also be increased from 25 per cent to 27.7 per cent of MTAW.

There will be no change to the Service Pension qualifying age for Veterans. This will remain at 60 for men and progressively increasing to 60 for women.

VETERANS' HEALTH WEEK 24-30 AUGUST 2009

Veterans' Health Week is encouraging the veteran community to get involved in activities that promote and maintain the health and wellbeing of the veteran communities, their families and carers.

The week will be jam packed full of exciting, fun and rewarding experiences to highlight the advantages of taking the time to get out there and be '**stronger, healthier and happier**'.

This year's focus for Veterans' Health Week is on physical activity and the benefits of taking simple and effective exercises into a daily routine.

More than half of Australian adults don't do enough exercise to stay healthy and avoid medical problems later in life. Being physically active is important to maintain your health and wellbeing at any age. Just 30 minutes on most days of the week will provide you with health benefits including an increase in energy and concentration, weight control and a reduction in your risk of chronic diseases.

A range of activities will be occurring during Veterans' Health Week. To find an event in your region contact your local Veterans' Affairs Network office on 133 254 (for metropolitan callers) or 1800 555 254 (for non-metropolitan callers).

2009 ANZAC AWARDS ANNOUNCED

The ANZAC of the Year Awards are made annually '*to recognise the efforts and achievements of up to seven Australians who have given service to their fellow Australians and to the community in a positive, selfless and compassionate manner.*'

The National President has announced the recipients of the 2009 ANZAC of the Year awards. They are:

Ms Moira Kelly AO of Victoria

- in recognition of her devotion and dedication over many years in providing social support and service for disadvantaged people.

Mr Lambis Englezos of Victoria

- in recognition of his untiring and tenacious work towards the discovery of the burial site of World War I Australian soldiers at Pheasant Wood in France.

Mr Ivor Elliott of NSW

- in recognition of his many years of service, through numerous community service

groups and the RSL, to the communities in the Forster District.

Mr Frank Williams of NSW

- in recognition of his many years of dedicated service to the veteran and wider community of Wee Waa.

On behalf of the RSL National Executive and Members, Major General Crews has extended his congratulations to the Award recipients. In doing so, Major General Crews has added; 'the award recipients exemplify the Spirit of ANZAC within the community through their dedication and commitment to the benefit of others.'

Parliamentary Inquiry into the concerns of F-111 Deseal/Reseal maintenance workers

The inquiry was conducted by the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. The committee held six public hearings between 30 May 2008 and 17 April 2009 and considered more than 130 Submissions.

The committee tabled their final report in parliament on the 25 June 2009.

In its report the committee has made eighteen recommendations to the Government.

The Government will consider these recommendations and the Government's official response to the Deseal/Reseal report will be announced publicly in due course.

A copy of the report is available online at:
www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfad/deseal_reseal/report.htm

**SERVICE FOR RSL
MEMBERS
LEGAL ADVISORY
PANEL
FREE INITIAL
CONSULTATION**

Need help with:

- Accident and injury advice?
- Help with neighbourhood disputes?
- Commercial and property transactions?
- Estate matters?

The RSL Legal Advisory Panel can assist members in need of general legal advice, other than applications and appeals to the Veterans' Review Board and Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The Panel comprises four firms, namely:

- Beston Macken McManis (offices in Sydney and Parramatta);
- Bryan Gorman & Co (Sydney and Campbelltown);
- Gathercole & Associates (Sydney);
- L Rundle & Co (Sydney and Eastwood).

Each of these firms will be available, on a monthly roster, to assist members with their general legal needs.

If you need friendly and efficient legal advice, with a free first consultation, call State Branch on 02 9264 8188 for a referral.