



BETTER SERVICES FOR VETERANS

CARING FOR OUR VETERAN COMMUNITY

The Greens' plan for supporting veterans and their families

The Greens believe that if we are prepared to send men and women to serve Australia on our behalf, we have a responsibility to care for them properly when they return. Our plan will ensure our veterans receive the care they deserve.

Veterans face unique challenges to their health and wellbeing which require strong and caring policy responses.

Whether they have recently returned from Iraq or Afghanistan or from service decades ago, many veterans suffer mental ill-health as a result of their experiences. We need to make sure that mental health services are readily available to veterans and their families and that we are responsive to the changing needs of the veteran community.

The Greens believe in appropriately recognising the service of groups who have been ignored by previous governments, and addressing the current unfairness which disadvantages service personnel who are injured during deployment.

> CARING FOR OUR VETERANS

The Greens care about people – that's why we have a plan to ensure that all veterans are adequately looked after when they return to Australia, whether it be from conflict zones or other service on our behalf.

The Australian Greens' plan will:

- **Dedicate \$6 million to develop effective mental health** support programs for veterans, namely Mates4Mates and Men's Sheds.
- **Fund research** into the specific needs of female veterans.
- **Recognise the service** of British and Commonwealth Occupation Forces, SEATO nurses and the Australian Women's Land Army, giving them access to the services and benefits they deserve.
- **Ensure injured service personnel** are not financially disadvantaged while they are being treated.

> BETTER WELLBEING SUPPORT

We know that many veterans returning from war and conflict will face challenges in adjusting to civilian life. Sadly, others will experience long lasting and significant impacts and continue to struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions. Families and carers of veterans share the consequences of their service and this struggle.

We are now looking at a large group of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. We must learn from the experiences of past veteran groups to ensure we care for our veterans in the best possible way, while making sure programs respond to the unique needs of veterans returning from current conflict zones.

The challenge of stigma has long been a barrier to veterans seeking the help they need. Community-based programs like Mates4Mates and Men's Sheds have been effective in countering the stigma around mental ill-health and supporting those who need help in a safe environment.

The Greens want to see Mates4Mates expand nationally, so veterans in each state and territory can benefit from the program. This not-for-profit project, established by the Queensland Branch of the Returned Services League, provides effective, peer-based support for veterans and their families. Our funding boost of \$1 million per year would help to start its national expansion, assisting veterans in other states.

The Greens also recognise the important role Men's Sheds can play in providing peer support. A place where mental wellness is promoted, Men's Sheds can provide a connecting point for men who are often facing similar experiences or challenges in life. We will fund the Australian Men's Shed Association to develop veteran-specific support services in Men's sheds and to support veterans' sheds which are already being established, with a grant of \$3 million over 3 years.



Providing affirming support is a crucial part of caring for veterans' mental health and wellbeing. Our \$6 million investment, over 3 years, will improve access supportive networks for veterans and work to break down the stigma surrounding the mental ill-health and pressures which can follow service.

> IMPROVING CARE FOR FEMALE VETERANS

The Greens recognise that female veterans face a unique set of occupational challenges. We also know that female veterans experience particular pressures on their mental health which are not yet fully understood.

Caring for our veterans means understanding the unique needs of female veterans.

To this end, the Greens propose to make female veterans' wellbeing a discrete research priority area in the Department of Veterans' Affairs Applied Research Program (ARP). To cover this, we would increase funding to the ARP by 25%, at a cost of \$2.7 million over 3 years.

> RECOGNISING ALL VETERANS & THOSE WHO'VE SERVED OUR NATION

The Greens believe that those who serve Australia should be appropriately recognised and receive the benefits they are entitled to. Successive Coalition and Labor Governments have failed to recognise some groups due to the nature of their service.

Around 17,000 Australian troops were deployed to Japan immediately after World War II as part of The British and Commonwealth Occupational Forces (BCOF). They served in difficult conditions, recognised by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) as hazardous. Many surviving BCOF veterans believe the illnesses they suffer today are directly attributable to fallout from the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Currently, because of the way their service is classified by DVA, these veterans do not receive the same benefits as their fellow servicemen who served in WWII. This means that they are limited in the health services they receive from DVA.

The Greens' plan is to award the BCOF veterans Extreme Disablement status (EDA) under the Veterans Entitlements Act 1986, giving them a DVA Gold Card and thus access to the health benefits they desperately need. There are not many BCOF personnel left – only about 450. It's high time to help them before it's too late

Our plan also involves recognising the members of the Women's Land Army, who currently have no access to entitlements

through DVA at all. These women were recruited by the Australian government to assist with the war effort during WWII, enduring extreme labour and harsh living conditions, which in many cases had long term impacts on their health.

Previous Coalition and Labor governments have not granted Women's Land Army veterans any entitlements through DVA, meaning they need to cover their own health costs. The Greens' plan will entitle them to benefits and services under the Veterans Entitlements Act 1986. We've costed this measure, together with extended entitlements for BCOF veterans, at up to \$34 million over 3 years.

The old parties have also failed to care for the nurses who served in Vietnam as part of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). These Australian nurses volunteered their skills to serve on civilian and surgical teams from 1964 to 1972.

Many suffer the same war-related illnesses as Vietnam veterans, yet have been ignored by successive governments, receiving no support for their health and medical expenses.

The Greens want to address this injustice by extending the Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986 to cover the SEATO nurses who served in Vietnam. We would commit \$8.3 million over the forward estimates to achieve this; including granting these nurses access to the Veteran's Gold Card to provide free medical assistance for conditions arising from their service.

We believe that by failing to care for these groups, the old parties have defined their service as less important or valuable than others. They willingly volunteered to serve our country in its hour of need. It is only right to recognise their service and grant them the respect and care they deserve.

> LOOKING AFTER INJURED SERVICE PERSONNEL

The Greens believe that our servicemen and women should not be financially worse off if they are injured during deployment.

Currently, members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) receive a tax exemption when they are on deployment overseas. But through an unfair quirk of the taxation system, if they are injured and return to Australia for treatment during that time, they lose their tax exemption (and the accrual of annual leave) once they leave hospital.

Our plan will address this inequity by ensuring all ADF members are entitled to the allowances and the exemption on pay that applies under section 23AD of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* for the same period for which they were to be deployed, whether they are injured or not.



> EQUITABLE AND EFFECTIVE SERVICES

The Greens are committed to caring properly for those who serve us.

We are making veterans' mental health and wellbeing a priority through programs which will counter stigma and assist veterans and their families get the help they need.

We are recognising the unique needs of female veterans.

We are looking after those who have served Australia, no matter the nature of their service.

We are addressing the financial inequity experienced by injured service men and women.

The Greens acknowledge the sacrifice made by Australian service personnel and their families. We have the greatest respect for the bravery and resilience of these men and women. If we are willing to send people off to serve Australia in conflict zones, we must ensure we care for them properly when they return.