



National Patron
RADM Neil Ralph AO DSC RAN

VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA[®]

ABN 19 068 073 450

NATIONAL COUNCIL

INCORPORATED IN NSW

Web Site: <http://www.vvaa.org.au>

President

Brian McKenzie OAM
16 Elinga Street
HOWRAH TAS 7018
Phone (03) 6247 7778
Fax (03) 6247 7778
eMail vvaanatpres@bigpond.com

Secretary

Geoff Trevor-Hunt OAM JP
PO Box 8108
WARNBRO WA 6169
Phone (08) 9594 0429
Fax (08) 9594 0429
eMail vvaasec@bigpond.com

MEDIA RELEASE - 15 September 2002

VETERAN COMMUNITY USED AS PAWNS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

The National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Brian McKenzie said today; that gold card holders in the Veteran community are being used by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) as a bargaining tool to pressure the government to increase the schedule fee paid to doctors.

Mr McKenzie was commenting on a recent report from Dr Kerryn Phelps, AMA President, that a survey revealed that 41 per cent of Local Medical Officers (LMO's) GP's who offer discounted fees to war veterans are considering withdrawing from the Federal Government's Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS), if the government fails to increase funding for the scheme.

Mr McKenzie said; this Association is very aware of the AMA's campaign to put pressure on government to increase benefits paid to doctors across the board under the MBS. Veterans are just a small proportion of the general community who benefit.

Mr McKenzie said; while we do not deny the right of the AMA to seek an appropriate increase on behalf of their membership, which may be warranted, we take a dim view of using veterans, who have made significant sacrifices for this country, being used in this way, and this includes thousands of Vietnam veterans who are totally and permanently incapacitated due to their war service,

The facts are that, LMO's currently receive 100% of the schedule fee for treating veterans with a gold card, but only 80% of the schedule for others, so why is the AMA singling out veterans. It's a clear indication that the AMA sees us as a better bargaining tool, Mr McKenzie said.

It appears that the recent flood of DVA gold cards into the health system has created an ever shrinking margin for both the doctors and the government. The two need to work together to ensure that veterans receive the very best of health care, Mr McKenzie said.

The government is also under ever increasing pressure to further extend the card to Allied veterans as well. Given the current controversy - can we afford it? The government needs to meet its obligation and start looking after current gold card holders, the majority of whom are in their latter years, and stop handing them out for political expediency.

Mr McKenzie said; to use sick and disabled war veterans and war widows as a political football is a utter disgrace, and he called on the AMA and Government to continue to sit down at the negotiation table, to discuss fee adjustments, without all the rhetoric generated from all quarters of the political spectrum, which is causing unnecessary angst amongst members of the veteran community.

This countries war veterans deserve better, Mr McKenzie said

Media Contact: Brian McKenzie 0439 030 429