



**VIETNAM VETERANS
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**

**SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW COMMITTEE OF THE
VETERANS' ENTITLEMENT ACT**

**Part 7
DISABLED DESCENDANTS**

18 April 2002

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DISABLED DESCENDANTS – VVAA SUBMISSION

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DISABLED DESCENDANTS – VVAA SUBMISSION

Introduction

Support discontinued

Disabled descendants of deceased veterans were provided with medical treatment by the Department of Veterans' Affairs under the Repatriation Act 1920.

They are now not entitled to this treatment under the VEA Act 1986, although some are covered under continuation provisions, and also (recently) under the Family and Community Services Act.

Discussion

The basis for the VVAA position

The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia was founded on the basis of concerns by veterans that they were exposed to chemicals and that as a result their children suffered significant health problems. The exposures were later identified as dioxins, cocktails of chemicals and dilutants, as well as virulent contaminants through herbicide spraying and ingestion of other chemical agents whilst on service in Vietnam. The effects of these chemicals are such that major health problems are being suffered by Vietnam Veterans and through genetic distortion, these and other problems are being passed on to their children and their childrens' children.

Evatt discredited, genetic problems already recognised

The Evatt Royal Commission into exposure to chemicals concluded that there was no evidence to link such exposure to their health problems. Current scientific and medical research has totally discredited the findings of the Commission, and indeed, as scientific knowledge increases, and sound scientific methods are applied to the allegations of Vietnam veterans, further problems are being identified and some, including *spina bifida manifesta* and *cleft lip and palate* have already been confirmed and accepted.

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Discussion, Continued

Trend expected to continue as exposures increase

The VVAA expects this trend to continue as more sophisticated scientific methodology is applied to the issue. Current discussions between the United States and the government of Viet Nam is focussed on this issue.

Evidence being gathered in relation to the Gulf War, and potentially from Afghanistan only increases the concern of the ex-Service community that exposure to unknown agents is a fact of modern warfare. Further, this exposure occurs at times of great emotional and physical vulnerability.

The list of exposures includes chemicals, radiation and biological and biochemical agents or precursors that may lead to chromosomal or DNA damage that can be passed on to generation and generation.

Anomalies

Exposure of Australian Service personnel to agents that can cause chromosomal or DNA damage is acknowledged as increasing.

Genetic damage to the parent causes adverse changes in their children. Some genetic abnormalities have already been recognised.

The VEA makes no provision for accepting the responsibility for looking after those children whose health problems arise as a direct result of the parent's Defence or war service.

A de facto recognition of responsibilities is inherent in the acceptance of these conditions, and some rare cancers, for treatment by DVA, as well as the extension of the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service facilities to the children of Vietnam veterans. This recognition must be formalised.

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Recommendations

**Recommend-
ation**

7. The VVAA recommends that the Veterans Entitlements Review committee propose that government:

- (a) implement an assessment procedure to reinstate provision of medical treatment from DVA resources to those descendants of deceased veterans who would have been supported by their parents;**
 - (b) provide an income support supplement, similar to that paid to war widows, for qualifying disabled descendants;**
 - (c) establish criteria based on “reasonable hypothesis” that the medical condition or deformity claimed by the descendant is a direct result of the service of the parent; and**
 - (d) should such condition be proven, provide for the descendant in the same manner as if the descendant were a veteran.**
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