

# **Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024**

## **Response to the Exposure Draft**

**April 2024**

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### **Introduction**

I am a War Widow and member of Australian War Widows Queensland.

I acknowledge the enormous challenge of simplifying the existing VEA, DRCA and MRCA.

I ask the Australian Government and members of the Australian Parliament to put the needs of our ex-servicemen and women and their families first when making decisions about the Bill.

I support the 'grandfathering' of existing benefits to War Widows/ers under the Veterans Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA). The purpose of which is to ensure that Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) clients will retain all existing entitlements.

### **Use of the Term 'Wholly Dependent Partner'**

I am the very proud War Widow of a World War 2 Veteran and through the Australian War Widows Queensland I have daily contact with other War Widows and Widowers, a vast majority of whom have expressed to me their disgust at the possibility of being called a 'Wholly Dependent Partner'.

My concern relates to the actual term rather than the definition contained in Section 5 or the criteria set out in Section 17. The term 'Wholly Dependent Partner' is not consistent with standards today where a partner has varying degrees of both financial and social independence. For me as with many War Widows/ers, in the last few years of his life my husband, when not in hospital was 'dependent' on me because of illness as result of war service injuries.

My partner paid the price for his service, and I proudly call myself a War Widow to honour him.

To my knowledge this change has been made with no consultation with current War Widows/ers and displays ignorance on the part of those who have made or recommended these changes.

The existing 'Wholly Dependent Partners' under MRCA are issued with Gold Cards which use the very well-known and understood term 'War Widow' as an identifier.

I have recently become aware that DVA are referring to clients under MRCA as "Wholly Dependent Partners" and under VEA it is 'War Widows/ers', although the Gold Card for all clients is issued with 'War Widow' as the identifier. So currently War Widows/ers are referred to with two different titles depending on which legislation they fall under.

This is now causing confusion and stress among War Widows when DVA refers a Gold Card holder to Centrelink Confirmation eServices (CCeS) and the client is recorded as "MRCA Wholly Dependent Partner" with a Gold Card embossed "War Widow". The Queensland Government does not recognise the term Wholly Dependent Partner for the State Government rebates and is declining War Widows/ers entitlements, example state electricity rebates.

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## My Questions are:

- War Widows have been referred to as such since World War 1.
- The term 'Wholly Dependent Partner' is derogatory, why was it chosen?
- Whose decision was it to change the name?
- On what grounds is there a need to change the name from War Widow/er?
- Why has there been no consultation with War Widows/ers and ESOs directly involved in this important matter?
- By changing the name from 'War Widow/er' to 'Wholly Dependent Partner' what are, if any, and to whom do the benefits apply?
- Will DVA collaborate with State Government Departments to ensure that any changes are understood and War Widow/ers are not caused stress and disadvantaged by these changes?

A large percentage of War Widows/ers are elderly, not computer literate, have hearing difficulties and have problems trying to deal with Government Departments.

## My Submission – The use of the Term 'Wholly Dependent Partner'.

I urge that the use of the term 'Wholly Dependent Partner' be removed from MRCA and replaced with 'War Widow/er'.

I ask that DVA as a matter of urgency consult with ESOs who have an interest in this matter to resolve our concerns, Australian War Widows Inc, Partners of Veterans, RSL, and Legacy to resolve this very important matter concerning the many thousand War Widows and Widowers in Australia.



Mrs Judith [REDACTED]

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28 April 2024