



The Hon De-Anne Kelly BE MP
Federal Member for Dawson
Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence

BUDGET STRENGTHENS VETERANS' HEALTH SERVICES

The Australian Government will spend an additional \$79.1 million over four years to further strengthen medical services available to members of the veteran community.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, De-Anne Kelly, said the new funding in the 2005-06 Federal Budget would increase fees paid to anaesthetists, Local Dental Officers and a range of allied health professionals.

"The Government has moved strongly in the past two Budgets to address concerns about continued access to medical care through the Gold and White Repatriation Health Cards," Mrs Kelly said.

"These initiatives add to the \$325 million already committed to increase fees paid to general practitioners and specialists for treating veteran patients."

Fees for anaesthetists providing services under the repatriation system will increase by 20 per cent from 1 July 2005. Mrs Kelly said the initiative, at a cost of \$30.4 million over four years, would extend to anaesthetists the same fee increase for procedures provided to other specialists. The Government will also introduce a single claim system for anaesthetists to claim fees from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, reducing red tape and administration costs.

The Government will provide \$30.5 million over four years to deliver annual fee increases for Local Dental Officers. Commencing on 1 July 2005, the fee increase will be phased in with a total increase of 13.6 per cent by 2008-09. This will be in addition to normal indexation.

The Government will almost triple the annual monetary limit for high cost dental items, from \$749 to \$2000 a year, reducing the amount veteran patients have to pay for high cost services such as crowns.

Fees for allied health professionals will also increase over the next four years, at a total cost of \$18.2 million. Over four years, the initiative will provide a total average increase of 8 per cent for chiropractors, osteopaths, dieticians, occupational therapists and physiotherapists and 30 per cent for psychologists, social workers and speech pathologists. Mrs Kelly said the increases varied by profession, reflecting the relativity of current fees to average industry rates.

Mrs Kelly said the Government had listened to health professionals, who had put together a constructive case for a fee increase.

Budget 2005-2006
Department of Veterans' Affairs

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"Health care for our older veterans and those who are injured in the service of our nation remains a top priority for the Howard Government," she said.

"These initiatives ensure veterans and war widows continue to have access to the quality medical care they need."

Over the next four years from 1 January 2006, the safety net threshold for concessional patients under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which also applies to the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, will be increased by two prescriptions each calendar year, from the current 52 per year to 60 prescriptions in 2009. For general patients under the PBS, the safety net threshold will increase from the current level of \$874.90 by the dollar equivalent of two prescriptions each year until 1 January 2009.

"This measure will encourage the appropriate and safe use of medicines and continues the Government's approach of an appropriate balance of patient and taxpayer contributions to the increasing cost of pharmaceuticals and helps to maintain the sustainability of the PBS," the Minister said.

"Eligible veterans will continue to benefit from concessional rates on prescription medicines and the payment of the DVA pharmaceutical allowance."

The veteran community would benefit from funding to continue initiatives including the Quality Use of Medicines programme and GP involvement in Home Medicines Reviews, which support veterans and other patients in using their prescription medicines safely and effectively.

Mrs Kelly welcomed continued funding for initiatives promoting better outcomes in mental health care, asthma management and cervical cancer screening.

"Veterans' Affairs works closely with the Health and Ageing portfolio on a number of health programmes of benefit to both veterans and the wider community. I am pleased to see funding continue for these important initiatives," Mrs Kelly said.



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Fee increase for allied health services to veterans

What funding is the Government committing to the new initiative?

- ▶ The Government has committed \$18.2 million over four years to increase fees for a range of allied health professionals providing services to members of the veteran community.

What have we done in the past?

- ▶ Currently, the Government pays fees to allied health professionals for services to veterans, based on a fixed fee schedule that is indexed on an annual basis.

What is new?

- ▶ Allied health professionals will receive a fee increase each year for the next four years. This is in addition to annual indexation fee increases.

How will the initiative benefit veterans?

- ▶ The initiative will ensure veterans have continued access to allied health services across Australia.

Who will benefit from the new initiative?

- ▶ All allied health professionals will benefit from the initiative apart from podiatrists, who previously received a fee adjustment.

When will the initiative conclude?

- ▶ The initiative will commence on 1 July 2005 with increases phased in by 2008-09.
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Fee increase for dentists providing services to veterans

What funding is the Government committing to the new initiative?

- ▶ The Government has committed \$30.5 million over four years to increase fees for dentists providing services to the veteran community and to increase the annual monetary limit for high cost dental services.

What have we done for dentists in the past?

- ▶ Currently, the Government pays fees to dentists providing services to veterans, based on a fixed fee schedule that is indexed on an annual basis. The Government makes a contribution for high cost dental services, such as crowns, which is indexed annually.

What is new?

- ▶ Under the initiative, dentists will receive a fee increase in addition to annual indexation increases. The annual monetary limit for high cost dental services covered by Schedule C of the Repatriation Commission Dental Fee Schedule will increase from \$749 per annum to \$2000.

How will the initiative benefit veterans?

- ▶ The initiative will ensure veterans have continued access to dental services across Australia. The increase in the annual monetary limit on high cost dental services means that eligible veterans will not have to contribute as much for these services. The increase will provide opportunities for eligible veterans to receive these services where previously they may not have felt that they could contribute.

Who will benefit from the new initiative?

- ▶ All dentists providing services to veterans will benefit from the initiative.

When will the initiative conclude?

- ▶ The initiative will commence on 1 July 2005, with increases phased in by 2008-09.
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Fee increase for anaesthetists providing services to veterans

What funding is the Government committing to the new initiative?

- ▶ The Government has committed \$30.4 million over four years to increase fees paid to anaesthetists providing services to eligible veterans.

What have we done in the past?

- ▶ Currently, the Government pays fees to anaesthetists for services to veterans through one of two payment systems – under Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) arrangements or under DVA time-tiered arrangements.

What is new?

- ▶ The new initiative will reduce red tape and administrative costs by having only one remuneration system using the MBS Relative Value Guide methodology. Furthermore, the fees currently paid by the Government to anaesthetists who treat veterans will increase by 20 per cent.

How will the initiative benefit veterans?

- ▶ Veterans can be assured of having access to specialist anaesthetic services. All Gold and White Card holders will benefit from assured access to these providers.

Who will benefit from the new initiative?

- ▶ All specialist anaesthetists treating eligible veterans.

When will the initiative commence?

- ▶ This initiative will take effect from 1 July 2005.
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