

You may by now have heard about the Australian Government's proposed health benefits, veterans' and social access card. This card will update all the service, benefit, concession and treatment cards issued by the Australian Government to modern, more secure, smart card technology.

The introduction of the Access Card is potentially a big change for the veteran community as it will replace all veterans' cards issued by my Department. Your members, naturally, may feel uncertain about aspects of these changes. The purpose of this letter is to reassure you that my Department and I are representing the interests of veterans in the development and implementation of the Access Card. The Government is being transparent by releasing information as it becomes available. For example an exposure draft of the Access Card legislation was released for public comment in December last year, and changes have been made as a result of community feedback.

The Access Card is a large project and it is impossible to have all the answers from the outset. However I will endeavour to keep you informed of progress and, as always, I am willing to listen to your concerns.

First and foremost is to reassure you that the Gold card will remain unique to the veteran community and its value retained. There will be a gold Access Card for current DVA Gold card holders. Current Gold card holders will get a gold Access Card, unless they tell us otherwise. This choice is to cater for those who, for reasons of their own choosing, would not like to identify as a veteran but maintain the Gold card benefits. This is possible because the computer chip on the card will be programmed by the Government with the Gold card entitlement. No-one who is not entitled will receive a gold Access Card.

Another issue I would like to clarify is that current DVA card holders with markers on the face of their card such as War Widow, EDA or TPI will have these transferred to their Access Card. These markers help veterans and war widow/ers access discounts and concessions.

The new gold Access Card will function as a Gold card and also as a Medicare card, or a pension concession card or any of the cards planned for inclusion, depending on the individual's eligibility. It will combine the functions of these cards into a single piece of plastic. This means that many veterans who have more than one government-issued card will no longer have to carry all these cards around.

The introduction of the Access Card will not affect entitlements. It will have no impact on any pension, health service, compensation, income support or other service or payment from my Department or other agencies. This includes private health treatment under existing DVA arrangements.

Card technology has changed significantly since embossed cards and magnetic strip cards were first introduced several decades ago. The health benefits, veterans' and social services access card provides the Australian Government with the opportunity to take advantage of more secure smart card technology.

A benefit of this technology for veterans is the ability to choose to add information to the chip on the card. This might include emergency contact details, allergies or organ donor status.

A fundamental principle of the Access Card is that information about an individual will stay with the department or agency concerned. For veterans this means their Veterans' Affairs file stays with my Department and that information is not shared with other agencies, nor is it accessible via the Access Card.

While veterans will continue to deal with my Department about their veterans' benefits and entitlements, the introduction of the Access Card will mean once-only updating of change of address and family information. This will reduce the need to fill in forms and visit or telephone DVA VAN, Medicare and Centrelink offices. It also means that it is more convenient to change your address with DVA by visiting a Medicare office at the local shops instead of travelling to a DVA office in town, the Access Card will make this possible.

To get an Access Card, veterans will need to undertake a registration process. The details of registration are still being worked through. However, veterans will be provided with support in understanding the transition process to the Access Card. The registration process will involve completing a pre-registration form, attending an interview, having a photo taken and being subsequently mailed the card.

I am aware that this registration process may present difficulties for many in the veteran community. These difficulties may include providing documentation, physical difficulty in attending a registration interview, and other difficulties that members of the veteran community may have. My Department is currently working on resolution of these registration process issues for the veteran community. We want to make it as easy as possible for veterans while maintaining the integrity of the process and ensuring that each person can only get one card. I will update you when the resolution to these issues has been worked through.

The Government is also working to ensure the Access Card is not inappropriately used as an identity card. As an example, the Access Card legislation will make it an offence for the police or a bank to require you to produce your access card. There is also no requirement to carry the card. This means that the card will not become a general purpose form of identification in the way that state-based drivers licences have.

However you may use the card for any lawful purpose you may choose. Many veterans tell me the card will be of great benefit to them as they do not have a photographic identification to help access simple services in the community such as renting videos or opening a bank account.

More details information is on the internet at [www.accesscard.gov.au](http://www.accesscard.gov.au), which you may wish to share with your members.

My Department and I are working to ensure that veterans' needs are needed in the development of the Access Card. I will write to you again as the project develops and more outstanding issues have been resolved. In the meanwhile, I encourage you to share this information with your members in the interests of helping to dispel any fears they may have which are based on inaccurate information and rumours.

**Bruce Billson**  
5<sup>th</sup> March 2007



THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF  
AUSTRALIA WA BRANCH INCORPORATED

The Sub-Branch Signal

May 2007

# THE SUB-BRANCH SIGNAL

## PRESIDENT'S PEN

### The Sub Branch Signal

Recent events concerning communication of matters from State Branch to Sub Branches prompt me to remind Sub Branches that *The Sub Branch Signal* is the official communication link for dissemination of information throughout the League in Western Australia. It is therefore essential that the information sent out is communicated to all members at monthly meetings or selectively repeated in your own newsletters. As a further communication strategy, much of the contents of *The Sub Branch Signal* also appears in *The Listening Post*.

At State Headquarters we must therefore assume that if the matter has been presented in *The Sub Branch Signal* it has been communicated to members who are active in Sub Branch affairs.

### ANZAC Day 2007

Many thanks to all Sub Branches and local communities that organised 2007 ANZAC Day Services. From reports received the public turned out in force to honour our fallen servicemen and women and show support for our troops who are currently on deployment. It was also pleasing to hear from Schools who have contacted us to express appreciation for the support offered by local Sub Branches. Thanks to everyone for the professional manner in which you carried out your presentations.

### State Congress 2007

With ANZAC Day over it is now time to focus on Annual Congress. By mid-May you will be supplied with the Congress Agenda and other Reports. Please consider all material presented and be informed of the issues prior to your delegates attendance at the working sessions. I also remind Sub Branches that your Congress Returns should be lodged with headquarters as soon as possible. And as a reminder, we hope to see as many as possible at the Congress Dinner.

### ANZAC Small Grants Allocation

The first round of applications has been considered and shortly applicants will be advised of their success or otherwise. Some \$300 000 was allocated and accounted for a spread over all stated criteria. In the response letter you will be advised of reasons for any variation from the amount requested.

Should you have not been successful you may reapply in the next round after consideration of any feedback provided. The next round will be called for in July with a closing date sometime in late September.

### CEO/State Secretary

I am pleased to advise the membership that Mr Ian Griffiths has been appointed as the new CEO/State Secretary of the RSL in WA. Mr Griffiths was selected from a strong field of applicants and with his service background and experience I am certain he will serve the League well.

DOING BUSINESS  
WITH RSL  
8:30 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.

#### ANZAC HOUSE

28 St George's Terrace, Perth  
PO Box 3023  
Perth Adelaide Terrace WA 6832  
Website: [www.rslwahq.org.au](http://www.rslwahq.org.au)  
Email: [rslwahq@iinet.net.au](mailto:rslwahq@iinet.net.au)

#### RECEPTION

Monday to Friday - general enquiries

#### OFFICE CO-ORDINATOR

Monday to Friday - PA to  
State President & State Secretary,  
Email: [rslwahq@iinet.net.au](mailto:rslwahq@iinet.net.au)  
Tel: 9287 3799

#### MEMBERSHIP

Monday to Thursday - membership enquiries, Sub-Branch enquiries  
Email: [membership@rslwahq.org.au](mailto:membership@rslwahq.org.au)

#### WELFARE

Monday to Friday - welfare applications, emergency housing, food & lodging grants, SS&A Relief Trust Fund applications. Overseas pensions  
Email: [welfare@rslwahq.org.au](mailto:welfare@rslwahq.org.au)

#### ADVOCACY

Monday to Friday - S31 reviews, Veteran Review Board, Admin Appeals Tribunal  
Email: [rslwahq@iinet.net.au](mailto:rslwahq@iinet.net.au)  
Tel: 9287 3708

#### FINANCE

Monday to Friday - all account enquiries, Sub-Branch credits  
Email: [accounts@rslwahq.org.au](mailto:accounts@rslwahq.org.au)  
Tel: 9370 0200  
Sub-Branch Insurance, information, claims, grant application assistance, DVA, Lotterywest (ABN, tax)

#### PENSIONS

Monday to Friday - pension entitlements, claims preparation  
Email: [pensions3@rslwahq.org.au](mailto:pensions3@rslwahq.org.au)  
Tel: 9287 3709, 9287 3710

#### ANZAC CLUB

Monday to Friday - facilities bookings, catering/hospitality  
Email: [anzac-club@rslwahq.org.au](mailto:anzac-club@rslwahq.org.au)  
Tel: (08) 9287 3714

**WELFARE REPORT****The WA Aged Sailor's, Soldier's  
and Airmen's Relief Trust Fund  
"The Aged Fund"**

Are you a member of the RSL or eligible to join as a member and find yourself in emergency welfare circumstances?

Help is at hand – call the RSL Welfare Officer on 2987 3799 and ask for an application for assistance. Each application is private and confidential.

**Your Poppy Day money helping when you need it most.**

**PTSD Online**

It has come to the attention of the State Branch that Monash University in Victoria is offering a treatment programme for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder through an online computer arrangement. It would appear this online programme is designed to be a research programme and is for any person who considers they may be experiencing the condition of PTSD. It is suggested that if you are considering accessing this online programme, that before making a commitment you speak to your GP or a qualified health professional.

Increasing the knowledge of Veterans issues by Health Professionals.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs has advised that a new partnership has been established with the Australian General Practice Network. Its establishment is to ensure that GP's are made more aware of the need to increase awareness of veterans and defence force personnel and their families, of the uniqueness of military service and the need to improve the access for these people to mental health services across the whole range of medical services and facilities.

**Closure of Cypress Cottage**

As advised in the last edition of the Sub branch signal the decision has been made to close Cypress Cottage on 30 April 2007. The property will be handed back to Homeswest, who will determine the future of the property.

With the closure of Cypress Cottage, the State Branch through the Welfare Officer will arrange alternative arrangements for those people to access emergency accommodation where this cannot be met from other sources. The emergency accommodation will be based on needs of the individual and the best arrangement to ensure any illness is appropriately managed.

**Ray Ward, Chairman  
WA Veterans' Affairs Committee**

**MEMBERSHIP & YOUTH****COMMITTEE REPORT**

The interstate cadets arrived in Perth on the 18 April and were met by members of the committee. They were then transported to RAAF Base, Pearce to freshen up and later taken on a tour of Perth and Kings Park where they were met by Deputy Warden, Mr Phillip Skelton AM, deputy warden of the State War Memorial and Mr Norm Manners, chairman of the Honour Avenue Group. Refreshments were provided by the RAAF caterers and the cadets were able to relax and enjoy the views from Kings Park while they ate. They then proceeded to ANZAC House for a reception and were presented with travel journals and polo shirts for the trip. Many of the cadets stated it was the first time they had been inside an RSL and were quite impressed with ANZAC House. They were accompanied by three ADF instructors and a PR representative from RSL NSW.

After a comfortable night at Pearce they were transferred to the international airport ready to depart on their fantastic trip to North Borneo.

The 2007 Annual Continuous Training Period for Senior Cadets was held on the parade ground at Leeuwin Barracks, East Fremantle on Friday 20 April 2007. There were about one hundred cadets on parade including international cadets from the UK, USA, Canada and Sweden. The reviewing officer was Captain Stephen Davies from HMAS *Stirling*. It was a most impressive parade watched by many parents and guests.

Olga Greig OAM, Chairman

**REMEMBER INDIGENOUS SERVICE**

National Reconciliation week 2007 will take place around Australia from 27 May to 3 June, providing an opportunity to focus on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

This year is the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, the most successful in the nation's history, in which more than 90 per cent of voters said 'yes' to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australian citizens.

The theme for this year's activities is *Their Spirit Still Shines* and reflects on the contribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous campaigners who worked side by side to make the Referendum such a great success.

As part of National Reconciliation Week, DVA will work alongside ex-service and community organisations to hold ceremonies in each capital city, Townsville and Alice Springs to commemorate the service and sacrifice of Indigenous veterans.

A service will be held at the State War Memorial in Kings Park on Wednesday May 30<sup>th</sup> at 10.00am. For more information on the ceremonies visit [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au) or phone June Cuneo on 9366 8465.

**NEXT ISSUE**

Will contain poppy order forms for  
Remembrance Day

**MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS****AS AT 27 MARCH 2007**

Service Members	8,000
Affiliates	851

**HQ POSTAL ADDRESS**

RSL WA Branch  
PO Box 3023  
Perth Adelaide Terrace WA 6832

**RSL CARE REPORT****Geraldton**

Currently RSL Care WA is focusing its growth in rural areas with a proposed expansion to compliment the existing 29 Independent Living Units on the reserve next to the established village on Fraser St, Beachlands.

RSL Care WA plans to add 14 units to the site following on from 18 months of negotiations with the Shire of Geraldton.

The plans have been submitted to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure regarding acquisition of the land in the reserve.

**Dongara – Shire of Irwin**

RSL Care WA is currently in negotiations with the Shire of Dongara with a proposal of a 55 bed Aged Care Facility. The partnership means that the local authority will construct the facility whilst RSL Care WA will manage it.

At this stage a planning meeting is underway between the Shire, RSL Care WA and the proposed architects.

The proposal outlines that these beds will be made available by the end of 2008.

**Brookton**

RSL Care WA recently completed a tender to take over the management of the Brookton Nursing Home.

Details will be made available to the public on Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

**Menora Gardens**

The 118 bed facility which is currently under construction on the Menora site is progressing to schedule and is due for completion in October of this year.

Plans for the construction of a further 24 Independent Living Units on the site of the cluster homes in the north east corner of Menora Gardens have been submitted to the City of Stirling for planning approval. Construction of the units is scheduled to commence early in 2008.

Transformation of the area between the on site restaurant and the Aging in Place Facility, is now underway to make way for a beautiful area of landscaped gardens.

**Mundaring Village**

RSL Care WA recently approached to assess our interest to provide tender to take over the management of Mundaring Village which encompasses a 40 bed hostel and a 53 unit village. RSL Care WA has indicated our interest in being included when the tender is advertised.

**Lake Grace**

The management of Lake Grace Nursing Home has engaged in negotiations with RSL Care WA to undertake and manage a 9 unit extension to the current village.

**Esperence, Goldfields, Mid West and Wheatbelt**

RSL Care WA has been successful in attaining the Home Care contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs for the Esperence, Goldfields, Mid West and Wheatbelt regions of Western Australia

**RSL PRESIDENT'S  
AMBROSE CUP CHALLENGE**

Here's your chance to get out of the house and up of the couch and take part in some physical activity to help enhance your well being all the while enjoying the great outdoors by becoming a part of the RSL's Ambrose Presidents Cup Challenge.

Following on from the fun and success of last years Cup, this year offers players a chance to face the challenge once again either individually or by collaborating your skills as a team of four.

By becoming a part of the Cup, not only will you be helping yourself, by getting active for the day but you will also be supporting the welfare of our much valued Veteran Community with the money raised going towards helping them.

Registration prices are \$60 for individuals or \$240 for a team of four and includes your day of golf including buggy, refreshments on arrival, drinks throughout the day, and to cap off your day of play, presentations will be held at the Burswood Riverside Function Room and will include cocktail food and beverages.

Places are open to all branch and sub branch members and are strictly limited, so the sooner you get your team together, get your registration form filled out and sent in, the sooner your place will be guaranteed as will be a wonderful day out!

Come and enjoy the serenity of the Burswood Park Golf Course with the beauty of the Perth skyline as a backdrop, and a superb riverside setting. Come and take up the challenge, don't let this opportunity pass you by – are you up to it?

*If you are interested in joining in the fun and the challenge, please fax your completed Registration form to Doug Rasmusson at RSL on 9287 3732 by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2007.*

