

## **WAR WIDOWS PAYMENTS SET TO BE INCREASED**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Bruce Billson today announced that Australia's 114,000 war widows and widowers will benefit from pension payment increases and new indexation arrangements under significant measures.

These latest initiatives are in addition to the \$330 million veterans affairs disability pension enhancement package announced by the Prime Minister at the recent RSL National Congress, bringing the total combined package to more than \$470 million.

War widows and widowers currently receive a non-indexed pension component of \$25 a fortnight, formerly called a domestic allowance. This component will increase by \$10 a fortnight to \$35 from March 2008.

This payment will also now be indexed with reference to both the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) from March 2008.

Mr Billson said the Howard Government is committed to ensuring our war widows and widowers receive the support they deserve.

“The Australian Government acknowledges the heavy price paid by our war widows and widowers as the result of the premature loss of a spouse who served our country, or who later died from service-related conditions.

“I also acknowledge that the non-indexed \$25 pension component had remained relatively constant from when it was first introduced in 1946 and this issue concerned many war widows and widowers,” Mr Billson said.

“As a result the Australian Government has responded positively with these enhancement measures which will increase the value of this pension component and ensure its real value is maintained through indexation.

“The Australian Government has a special duty to provide strong levels of support to those who have been damaged as result of their service to our country and also their widows and widowers,” Mr Billson said.

“This commitment is underlined by the fact that more than \$1.6 billion in new funding has been allocated to the veterans' affairs portfolio in the past 18 months. Despite declining

veteran numbers the DVA budget has increased from \$6.5 billion in 1996 to more than \$11 billion today.”

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