Over the last 100 years we have provided aids and appliances to enhance veterans’ quality of life.
Mr JC Appleton, survivor of the sinking of HMAS Canberra, uses a lathe at the Caulfield Repatriation Hospital artificial limb factory to create prosthetics for other amputees, 1946. Over the past century, the techniques and materials used for prosthetics have undergone dramatic changes, and current appliances are a vast improvement on those first supplied at the end of the First World War. (AWM 131242)
Functions and powers

The Repatriation Commission was established on 1 July 1920 by proclamation of the Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Act 1920. When this Act and several other related Acts were replaced in 1986 by the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA), the Repatriation Commission was retained.

Under section 180 of the VEA, the functions of the Repatriation Commission are to:

- grant pensions, allowances and other benefits and provide treatment for veterans, their dependants and other eligible persons
- advise the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs on the operation of the VEA
- administer the VEA, subject to the control of the Minister.

Section 181 of the VEA gives the Repatriation Commission the power to do all things necessary or convenient to be done for, or in connection with, the performance of its functions, duties and powers.

The responsible minister under the VEA is the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. The Repatriation Commission provides advice to the Minister, who has the power to approve various actions of the Repatriation Commission.

The Repatriation Commission provides services under the VEA to veterans and members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their partners, widows, widowers and children.
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Structure

The Repatriation Commission has three full-time members appointed by the Governor-General: the President, Deputy President and Services member. The President is also Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and, in that capacity, is responsible to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Both the Deputy President and the Services member also assist the Secretary in the management of the Department. The Services member is known as the Repatriation Commissioner and is selected from nominations submitted to the Minister by ex-service organisations.

The President of the Repatriation Commission also serves as Chair of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC), ensuring consistency between the two Commissions and the Department. The remaining two Repatriation Commission members are also part-time members of the MRCC.

Membership

Liz Cosson AM CSC, President

Ms Cosson was appointed Secretary of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA), President of the Repatriation Commission and Chair of the MRCC on 19 May 2018.

Ms Cosson served for 31 years in the Australian Army, becoming the first woman to attain the rank of Major General. In 2001, Ms Cosson received the Conspicuous Service Cross for outstanding achievement as Chief of Staff, Peace Monitoring Group, Bougainville. In 2011, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for her exceptional service to the Australian Army and Australian Defence Organisation.

Ms Cosson joined the Australian Public Service in 2010 as First Assistant Secretary in DVA. Between 2012 and 2016, she held executive positions in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Department of Health. She returned to DVA, as Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, in 2016.

Ms Cosson has a Master of Arts, a Bachelor of Social Science and a Diploma in Management. She received the ACT Award for Excellence in Women’s Leadership in 2014.

Simon Lewis PSM, President

Mr Lewis was appointed Secretary of DVA, President of the Repatriation Commission and Chair of the MRCC on 11 July 2013 and retired on 18 May 2018. By virtue of holding the office of President of the Repatriation Commission, he was also Chair of the MRCC.
Craig Orme DSC AM CSC, Deputy President

Mr Orme commenced a five-year term as Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission on 2 February 2015 and is a member of the MRCC. Prior to joining the Repatriation Commission, Mr Orme served in the ADF for 37 years, most recently as the Commander Joint Task Force 633 in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Previously, he was a member of the MRCC, a Deputy Commissioner on the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission, and the Defence representative on the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Review.

Other senior appointments in Defence have included Head of People Capability, Commander of the Australian Defence College, Director General of Personnel—Army, and Commander of the 1st Brigade. He has masters degrees from the University of New South Wales and Deakin University.

Major General Mark Kelly AO DSC, Commissioner

Major General Kelly began his initial five-year appointment to the Repatriation Commission and the MRCC on 1 July 2010. He was reappointed for a further two years on 1 July 2015, and again for a further two years on 1 July 2017.

In an Army career spanning more than 35 years, he served in a number of senior command appointments, including as Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment; Commander 3rd Brigade; Commander 1st Division and the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters; Land Commander Australia; and Commander Joint Task Force 633 (CJTF 633).

Major General Kelly’s operational experience includes service with the Commonwealth Monitoring Force in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia (1979–80); service as Chief of Staff of the International Force in East Timor (1999–2000); service with US CENTCOM in the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and Iraq (2003–04); and service as CJTF 633, commanding all ADF elements in the Middle East Area of Operations, Iraq and Afghanistan (2009–10).

Relationship with DVA

The Repatriation Commission is responsible for the general administration of the VEA, with administrative support provided by DVA. The Repatriation Commission has no staff of its own but delegates its powers under section 213(1) of the VEA to DVA staff. The responsibilities of the two bodies are therefore inextricably linked, and the Repatriation Commission has a vital interest in DVA activities and in the assessment of the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of departmental programs.

DVA reports to the Repatriation Commission on the administration of major programs and the progress and outcome of all major reviews, including Australian National Audit Office performance audits.
Administration of the VEA

The Repatriation Commission has broad powers to enable it to carry out its functions and duties under the VEA. It also has specific powers to enter into contracts, deal with real or personal property, undertake building works and engage individuals and organisations to perform services.

Delegates on behalf of the Repatriation Commission are responsible for deciding and reviewing an individual’s entitlements to pensions, benefits and treatment under the VEA.

Repatriation Commission activity

The Repatriation Commission held 12 formal meetings to consider 55 submissions in 2017–18, compared with 16 formal meetings and 84 submissions in 2016–17. DVA is embracing significant change, and the Commission considered a range of policy improvements as well as policy matters relating to individual cases.

Matters considered by the Repatriation Commission in 2017–18 included:

• amendments to treatment principles
• delegation of Commission powers
• high-level policy and procedures relating to the VEA
• assistance for contemporary widows, widowers and dependants
• administration of the legislation and performance monitoring against key indicators and targets
• the DVA Strategic Research Model and associated research proposals.

The Repatriation Commission's activities under the VEA are focused on meeting the needs of all clients.
DVA celebrates 100 years of repatriation

In April 2018, DVA celebrated the centenary of the establishment of the Repatriation Commission and Repatriation Department, marking the beginning of the nation’s commitment to provide for Australians who served in war, and their families.

As part of the celebration, DVA published ‘Repat—A concise history of repatriation in Australia’ by Professor Philip Payton of Flinders University. The foreword to the book, extracted here, was provided by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs.

In early 1917, in the midst of the First World War and with an Allied victory not yet in sight, Prime Minister W.M. ‘Billy’ Hughes made a promise to the country’s armed forces on behalf of the Australian people. ‘When you come back we will look after you’, he declared. It was a solemn and binding promise and Hughes recognised returning soldiers would be entitled to say to the Commonwealth Government: ‘You made us a promise. We look to you to carry it out’.

Earlier in the war, public opinion had imagined the numerous voluntary patriotic funds which had sprung up across Australia would be enough to support the rehabilitation of returning men and women into civilian life. By 1917, however, the enormity of the task had become clear and both State and Commonwealth Governments understood legislative action was required. The result was the Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Act 1917, its chief architect Senator Edward Davis Millen who would become Australia’s first Minister for Repatriation. In April 1918, 100 years ago, the new Repatriation Commission and the Repatriation Department began work in earnest, aiming to fulfil the promise Hughes had made.

As well as bringing home the troops from overseas, ‘Repat’, as it was universally known provided war pensions, healthcare, education and training, employment and housing, soldier settlement and remembrance and commemoration. Ambitious in scope it attempted to address the widely varying needs of veterans and their dependants. The Repatriation Commission and Department were also anxious to work closely with the voluntary sector including the Returned Services League, Australian Red Cross, and Legacy, setting an example which continues to this day.

At first, it was imagined that once all the veterans of the First World War had been successfully ‘repatriated’, in the fullest sense of the word, the Commission and Department would quietly wither away, their job done. However, the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 led to a new ‘second wave’ of veterans, perpetuating the work of the Repatriation Department, as did early post-war conflicts such as the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation. Soon there was to be a significant ‘third wave’ of veterans as a result of the controversial Vietnam War, leading to lengthy and often heated debate, as well as extensive new medical research, about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the effects of Agent Orange, from which many hard lessons were learned. More recently military operations in East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, have led to a ‘fourth wave’ of veterans, different in many ways from those who had gone before.

In October 1976 the Repatriation Department was renamed the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and in the years ahead it embraced change enthusiastically as it responded to new opportunities and challenges. The Department proved an early advocate of the possibilities of technology and moved from being a major provider to a major purchaser of healthcare services. Increasingly ‘veteran-centric’ in their outlook as they approached their centenary, the Repatriation Commission and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs embarked upon an all embracing transformation process which aimed to engage with ‘all the domains of veteran well-being’ to ensure veterans and their families had a healthy and productive life.
By now the methods of the Commission and Department had changed out of all recognition since those early days in 1918. But Billy Hughes’ promise, made a hundred years ago, still holds true as ‘Repat’s’ guiding principle.

**The Hon Darren Chester MP**

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
March 2018

As the Minister describes, DVA’s current program of transformation is the latest milestone in a century of progress towards ensuring that the needs of veterans and their families are understood and met, and that their service and sacrifice are commemorated.

‘Repat’—A concise history of repatriation in Australia can be downloaded free of charge from the DVA website.

"Repat"—A Concise History of Repatriation in Australia

Philip Payton

Philip Payton is Professor of History at Flinders University, Adelaide, and Emeritus Professor of Cornish & Australian Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK. He spent part of his childhood in Perth, Western Australia, and later studied at the University of Adelaide. He served in the Royal Navy for thirty years, a dozen as a Regular and the rest as a Reservist, and was, inter alia, Senior Lecturer in the Department of History & International Affairs at the Royal Naval College Greenwich. In 2003 he was recalled to active service in the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal during the Iraq war.

Philip holds doctorates from the Universities of Adelaide and Plymouth, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books. He has written extensively on Australian, military and maritime history, including such titles as Regional Australia and the Great War (2012), The Maritime History of Cornwall (2014), Australia in the Great War (2015), and One & All: Labor and the Radical Tradition in South Australia (2016). His most recent books, both published in 2017, are A History of Sussex and Cornwall: A History. Philip lives in Adelaide with his wife Dee, also a former Naval officer.

Senator Edward Davis Millen (foreground) and members of the Repatriation Commission, meeting in May 1920 at the headquarters of the Repatriation Department in Melbourne. (AWM 12880)