



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Mr Mark Roberts
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Roberts,

**RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MATTER OF THE FINDINGS INTO THE DEATH
OF MRS PEARL RECHT – (CASE REFERENCE: COR2011 003161)**

I refer to your letter dated 13 December 2012 seeking a response from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) concerning the Deputy State Coroner's recommendations arising from the Inquest of Mrs Pearl Rech. DVA's response, as outlined below, relates to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

That the 'Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials', as endorsed by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council, are mandated for use by community aged care providers in Victoria, through inclusion of the information into the induction process for new community aged care workers. These materials should also be used for skills maintenance sessions/programs conducted by community aged care providers for existing workers.

Recommendation 2:

That basic home fire safety is incorporated into policy and practice guidelines for assessment processes used to assess older people for 'in home' services. In residences where the client is considered at greater risk due to health or lifestyle factors (as defined in Essential Knowledge: Basic Home Fire Safety, Section 2), additional smoke alarms should be installed to provide the earliest possible warning of a fire for the occupant.

The Department has carefully considered the recommendations the Deputy Coroner had made regarding the above matter.

As the Court may be aware, DVA operates two community services programmes which provide outreach support services to the elderly and frail in Victoria. These programmes are the Veterans' Home Care and the Rehabilitation and Appliance Program. The purpose of Veterans' Home Care is to provide low level in-home care service to eligible veterans and war widows and widowers who wish to continue living at home, but who need a small amount of practical help.

Saluting Their Service

The Rehabilitation and Appliance Program provides aids and appliances that assist entitled persons to be as self-reliant as possible in their own homes. The program aims to restore or maintain functional independence and to minimise the impact of disabilities. Aids may include mobility products, continence products and smoke alarms for the hearing impaired.

However, with respect to the Rehabilitation and Appliance Program, DVA has developed procurement arrangements for the provision of smoke alarms for entitled persons with a clinical need (such as a hearing impairment). DVA is also working to improve this service by requiring contractors who provide services for this program to undertake regular maintenance, including the provision of replacement batteries, for smoke alarms.

Comments specifically regarding the Recommendations

The most effective manner to implement the Coroner's recommendations would be through the introduction of state legislation for the community care industry along with the introduction of appropriate community care education training. In addition, the coroner's recommendations could be better effected through the introduction of a free installation and servicing based smoke alarm scheme for the elderly and frail who reside in Victoria to ensure a standard and consistent approach across the state. Similar schemes operate in other Australian states.

Additional comments

In line with DVA's practice of alerting our community care providers to relevant issues of concern, DVA will issue a Bulletin to our contracted community care providers to make them aware of the Victorian Coroner's recommendations in both this case and the complementary recommendations by the Coroner in relation to the death of Audrey Svikers.

DVA supports the Coroner's recommendations and is committed to ensuring its clients are aware of fire safety issues that can occur within the home. DVA will be publishing an article about fire safety in its quarterly newsletter, *Vetaffairs*, which is circulated to approximately 270,000 members of the veteran community. The article will highlight the importance of having working smoke alarms in the home as well as providing information regarding state based services, which are available to clients to assist them in reducing fire hazards within their home. DVA is confident that this article will assist our clients.

I trust that this information is of assistance to you. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Dr Christine McPaul, Assistant Secretary, Community, Aged Care and Transport Branch on 02 6225 4644.

Yours sincerely



Judy Daniel
First Assistant Secretary
Health and Community Services Division
Department of Veterans' Affairs

21 March 2013