



## Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study (COVVHS)

*Incorporating representatives of VVAA, PVAA, RSL, SDVVG, VVFA, T.P.I.*

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COVVHS is about concerned people coming together to promote the health issues facing many sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans. The objective being to promote policy change at Government level for improved services to those sons and daughters who have health problems which have arisen due to their parent's active service. An integral part of this is to undertake a medical study into children's health problems and to evaluate the services available.

COVVHS proposes that this initiative will be directed toward the children of veterans from all parts of Australia.

A meeting held at Eaglehawk (Bendigo) in March 2003 initiated by the Victorian Branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, drew very concerned and committed people from across the state. This sparked a more organised approach and the formation of COVVHS.

The first endeavor of COVVHS has been to bring together people from each of the veteran community organisations to provide a diverse range of skills and expertise.

Many individuals have been endeavoring to achieve recognition of the still births and miscarriages; the structural health problems (e.g. spina bifida); the acute illnesses (e.g. cancers); the suicides and accidental deaths; and the chronic ill health affecting children of Vietnam veterans.

There is a larger and more diverse range of problems than most realise. People from many areas of Australia have been contacting us with their individual stories of children's ill-health; wanting to understand if others have similar problems, and many not aware of a potential link with their parent's service. COVVHS welcomes input and factual 'stories' as it provides a greater understanding of the issues. All information remains confidential. Please contact COVVHS using the details provided herewith.

### **COVVHS Main Objectives are to :**

- Work with the veteran community in united endeavors to demonstrate to the Australian Government that there is significant impact on the health of veterans children, as a result of their parents' active service for Australia.

#### *Progress:*

- Formed a Steering Committee with representatives from SDVVG (Sons & Daughters), RSL, VVAA, AVADSC, VVFA, TPI, PVAA.
- Preparing a Strategic Plan, which outlines who we are, what we are endeavoring to achieve (objectives and approach), how we propose to go about it (strategies), and why there is a need.

- Create awareness, in the Australian community, of the ill health suffered by many sons and daughters of veterans, and the link that exists with their parents' active service for their country.

#### *Progress:*

- The approach is to inform and involve sons and daughters, and all ex-service organisations in all states and to enlist the expertise available in those organisations.
- Article submitted to Ex Service organisations for publication in their newsletters (eg. Chin-up, Mufti, Sons and Daughters Newsletter)
- Press coverage has included articles in the Melbourne Age, regional television, Gippsland regional radio, BBC radio, which have highlighted the health issues of veterans' children.
- SBS will show a documentary dealing with the practical health of Vietnam veterans' families on the 21 December 2003. Although not 'COVVHS presentation it deals with the lives of a committee member's family.

- Instigate an epidemiological study of veterans' sons and daughters, giving consideration to both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the health, and the impact on the quality of life.

*Progress:*

- *An professor of epidemiology has agreed to be a mentor for the study.*
- *Have consulted other eminent researchers to establish an approach.*
- *Organising a meeting to discuss options with the DVA.*
- *The approach is to commission a study, commencing with a feasibility study, based upon discussions with research organisations and DVA.*

Many sons and daughters, and their parents have contacted members of COVVHS, expressing concern for unwell sons and daughters of veterans,

The majority of the explanations about their illnesses indicate that these young adults are suffering important medical problems that their friends, outside of the veteran community rarely suffer.

'Stories' related include depression, inability to gain or retain employment, 'electricity' running through their bodies at any sign of anxiety, psychotic disorders, mental illness, and medical illnesses such as endometriosis, ovarian problems, bowel conditions, skin conditions, heart, kidney and eye problems, and many others. Most people are aware of the Morbidity Study of 1997, which, provided the first insight into the wide range of serious illnesses suffered by Vietnam veterans sons and daughters. The anticipated further study has not been sighted (or hardly discussed in the wider veteran community) let alone been acted upon by either the Government or the Repatriation Commission.

The recent Clarke Report, which undertook a review of veterans' entitlements, did mention health issues to do with veterans' children. Quote: *"The Committee understands that DVA has initiated some research into paternally-mediated birth defects and that further research is being proposed. The Committee .....notes that the issues is being examined by DVA through properly conducted research"*. Information received from the DVA indicated that no such research is underway, and *"large scale epidemiological*

*studies of the children of Vietnam veterans are likely to prove very expensive and time consuming"*.

The VVCS provide a very important and helpful service to these sons and daughters, which relate to the psychological needs. VVCS may be contacted on Phone 1800 011 046.

Each of the ex-service organisations is supportive of the need to look after the sons and daughters of veterans. The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia (PVAA), which is a national organisation, and soon to be incorporated in Victoria, provides support to partners of veterans. They are actively involved in looking at the health of veterans' sons and daughters.

COVVHS would appreciate obtaining a better understanding of the problems being suffered by sons and daughters with a view to representing their interests. COVVHS is accumulating statistical information, relating to the health of veterans' sons and daughters. Please feel free to e-mail or write to COVVHS. Phone contact information is also available -ALL INFORMATION IS TREATED AS HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL.

More information may be obtained from members of COVVHS about their activities. Please contact any of the following :

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