



AUSTRALIAN
WAR WIDOWS NSW LTD

SUMMER 2023

THE DIGEST

SPECIAL EDITION: INAUGURAL WAR WIDOWS DAY



AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS

NSW LIMITED

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www.warwidowsnsw.com.au

*"We all belong to each other.
We all need each other. It is in serving each
other and in sacrificing for our common good
that we are finding our true life."*

– King George VI, 1941

Under the patronage of
The Honourable Margaret Beazley
AC KC, Governor of New South Wales

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The Digest has been checked thoroughly
and to the best knowledge is correct.
However, errors may occur which are
beyond our control. If this should
happen, we apologise most sincerely.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Events

Town Halls

28 February 2023

28 April 2023

ACT Our Space Veteran

Family Group Launch

04 March 2023

Women's Day Webinar

08 March 2023

ANZAC Field of Remembrance

20 April 2023

Annual General Meeting

TBC June/July 2023

War Widows Day

19 October 2023

Commemorations & Key Dates

War Animal Day

24 February 2023

Anniversary Commonwealth

Naval Forces and

Australian Army Formed

01 March 2023

International Women's Day

08 March 2023

20th Anniversary

Commencement of the Iraq War (2003)

20 March 2023

Northern Beaches Social

Club 70th Anniversary

22 March 2023

Anniversary Formation Royal

Australian Air Force

31 March 2023

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Memorial Hyde Park



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State President
Address, Anzac
Memorial Hyde Park





The inaugural War Widows Day in NSW was a wonderful success. The day was many years in the making and took place thanks to the countless people who had championed recognition of war widows.

AWWNSW give thanks to the NSW Government for establishing the day, as well as to Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC and Mr Dennis Wilson for their attendance at the War Widows Day service. We also thank the Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park for allowing the first War Widows Day service to take place there, as well as the Australian Army Band for their musical contribution at the service. We also give thanks to everyone else who helped make sure the day was a success.

Lastly, we give thanks to war widows across NSW and ACT for embracing the opportunity to have our contribution and sacrifices acknowledged, as well as to the previous generations of women and men who came before us. These people paved the way for us to be able to stand together – strong, united and undivided – and mark War Widows Day each year, ensuring recognition of war widows gone by as well as those to come.

On War Widows Day, we honoured the contributions of the many women and men who have loved and lost veterans. We acknowledged your strength and resilience, and recognised the great sacrifices you have endured. You have persevered through unimaginable grief and hardships, raising your children, and supporting yourselves and your families through heartaches and sorrows.

You may not have worn the uniform or been recognised with medals and monuments but, along with other war widows and the partners of veterans, you have stood for over 100 years, stoically and silently, supporting your spouses and praying for their safe return while keeping the faith back home.

That was the purpose of War Widows Day: to recognise war widows and widowers in NSW, honouring your contributions and sacrifices in defence of Australia.

The day was well supported by the government, community and media. It provided a good opportunity to share the stories and struggles of war widows, as well as the success of AWWNSW. It shone a bright light on who we are, what we have endured and continue to endure, how we support each other, and how the government can better support us.

The day was a wonderful celebration of our founder, Mrs Jessie Vasey OBE CBE, and the incredible organisation she and so many others, including many of you, have built.

While the definition of war widows and widowers might have changed over the years, what hasn't changed is our support and friendship with each other, and that was evident on War Widows Day as we came together to mark the occasion.

The inaugural War Widows Day was just the start. Each year we will tell more stories, hold more services, and shine a brighter light on the sacrifice, struggles and strength of war widows.

QUEEN DUNBAR State President Australian War Widows NSW



*President, Queen Dunbar with NSW Minister for Veterans, The Hon. David Elliot MP at the WWD reception
Above Left, with our Patron at the WWD service*

Marking a historic day

It was a proud and honourable moment when, at the Premier's Vietnam Veterans' Day reception at Government House, Premier Dominic Perrottet announced that starting in 2022, 19 October would now be known as War Widows Day in NSW.

In attendance and joining the announcement was the Governor of NSW and AWWNSW Patron Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, and the Honourable David Elliot MP, NSW Minister for Veterans.

"Establishing a special day is a small token in recognising and honouring our war widows and widowers of those who made the ultimate sacrifice by serving in the defence forces," said the Premier.

"War Widows Day is an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution and personal sacrifice made by more than 15,000 surviving widows and widowers of servicemen and servicewomen across NSW."

Mr Elliot explained the significance of War Widows Day being held on 19 October.

"The date acknowledges the birthday of Mrs Jessie Vasey OBE CBE (1897-1966), founder of the Australian War Widows Guild in 1945," he said.

"Mrs Vasey, widow of Major General George Vasey, who was killed en route to New Guinea during the Second World War, worked tirelessly to ensure that war widows were recognised by governments in Australia and given the financial support and services they needed."

Meg Green AM, former State and National AWW President and a Vietnam War widow expressed her gratitude for the day.



NSW War Widows together with our Patron, the NSW Premier and NSW Minister for Veterans - 20 August 2022

Meg noted the importance of recognising war widows and in honouring their sacrifices.

Queen Dunbar, AWWNSW's State President, also acknowledged the importance of War Widows Day.

"This is a day for all who have been touched and bereaved by the death of their spouse as a result of their defence service," she said.

AWWNSW was overjoyed with the announcement. The day of recognition, acknowledging and paying tribute to war widows past and present, comes at a vital time for our community, when one-in-five Australian households have a connection to our defence forces.

Recognition of the sacrifices of war widows and defence families has been tirelessly campaigned for and was long overdue.

The Annual War Widows Day in NSW is an opportunity for the community to honour that war widows have been part of the fabric of NSW, making a valuable contribution to our community since World War One.

It is also an opportunity for us to highlight that there is still a way to go to offer the war widows and defence families of NSW the support they need.

Telling Australia about the day

Following the announcement by the Premier of New South Wales, Dominic Perrottet, that 19 October would now be known as War Widows Day in NSW, television, radio, newspapers and online media sites shared the news.

On the evening of 20 August 2022, the same day the Premier announced the new War Widows Day, Channel 7's nightly news was the first media outlet to air a story about it.

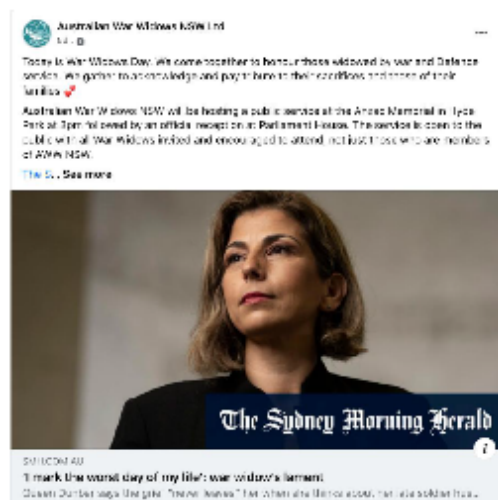
Channel 7 journalist Tom Hartley explained War Widows Day was an "opportunity to acknowledge the contribution and personal sacrifice made by the more than 15,000 surviving widows and widowers of servicemen and women across our state."

He went on to say, "The importance of this announcement, and this day, really can't be underestimated because widows and widowers have been fighting for formal recognition to be part of the veteran community since the end of the Second World War."

In the days and weeks that followed, there were several articles about the announcement of War Widows Day in both state and local newspapers.

Former State and National AWW President and Vietnam War widow Meg Green AM shared her story, which was published in major newspapers in every state across the country, including Herald Sun, The Daily Telegraph, The Courier-Mail, NT News and Townsville Bulletin.

"The opportunity to acknowledge the contribution and personal sacrifice made by the more than 15,000 surviving widows and widowers of servicemen and women across our state."



She detailed what it is like to be the partner of a serviceman or woman, and why the day is important.

In the article she said, "The powers that be need to know that women who are married to servicemen or partners with servicemen are the backbones of the families and those servicemen and women couldn't do their job unless there was someone supporting them."

She also said that War Widows Day will recognise their long-forgotten contributions to keep Australia safe.

War widow Barbara Robinson also shared her story with Wagga Wagga's The Daily Advertiser, while other local newspapers that covered the announcement included The Scone Advocate, The Singleton Argus, Muswellbrook Chronicle, Hunter Valley News, Nepean News and Myall Coast of the Area News.

ABC Radio broadcast the announcement across the state on its regional stations in Newcastle, New England North West, Coffs Coast, Riverina, Central West, South East NSW, Western Plains, North Coast, Upper Hunter and Mid North Coast.

This significant media coverage of the announcement created awareness, interest, and respect for the inaugural War Widows Day. This initial awareness and coverage played an important role in the success of the inaugural War Widows Day.

Telling our stories our way

When the inaugural War Widows Day was marked on 19 October 2022, it was mentioned by news outlets in almost every corner and crevice in the country. From Far North Queensland to Alice Springs to the Kimberley to Ballarat, the coverage of War Widows Day was spread far and wide, showing the respect for war widows and the esteem in which you are held.

State President Queen Dunbar shared her personal story to highlight the importance of the day, which was published in The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, Brisbane Times and WA Today.

“As a war widow myself, the creation and recognition of this day is very important to [me], my family and the community. We have all been through tough times together, listening and supporting each other through the good and bad days, providing a shoulder to cry on or a chuckle to get us through the dark times,” she said.

Local newspapers across the state also wrote about the day. The Coffs Coast News of the Area interviewed local Vietnam War Widow and AWWNSW Social Club Coordinator, Leonie Anderson, who is 86 years old. She spoke about how both her grandmother and mother were also war widows.

“We need to recognise and support war widows as a whole community for their service and sacrifice, no matter how they became a war widow,” she said.

“The war finished, and the world moved on, but the after effects on our servicemen and women did not leave them until they died and that impacted on us as war widows from long before we were widowed.”



Major radio stations including 2GB and 2UE in Sydney, and 2CC and 2CA in Canberra also covered War Widows Day, as well as 2web in Outback NSW. ABC Radio also broadcast news of War Widows Day across its channels all around Australia, in the big cities, regional centres and remote towns.

In the evening, WIN News aired a story about War Widows Day on its Illawarra, Central West, Riverina and MIA, and Border and North East stations.

“Every year Aussies take great pride in pausing to remember our fallen and those who served,” explained reporter Bruce Roberts.

“But there’s never been a day dedicated to those whose lives were altered by the loss of a husband [from war].”

He went on to say how the inaugural War Widows changed that.

War widow Karen Marceau was interviewed as part of the story.

“If you’ve lived with a veteran, you know the sacrifices that go on in that family, in that family unit. I think days like this are very important to remember them but also honour us,” she said.

AWWNSW CEO Renee Wilson was also interviewed as part of the story and spoke about how the memories of her husband's service remain raw.

"I know with my husband's incident, after 12 years, [you would think] it would start to settle, it doesn't, it's just like it was yesterday," she said.

Vietnam War widow Pam Bowmaker also spoke with raw emotion when talking about what it is like to be the partner of a veteran.

"It is hard to talk about what [we went through], as widows and wives," she said.

The WIN News story also shared footage from the War Widows Day service held at Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park.



The news coverage mentioned ways to support widows, including buying a widow a coffee or purchasing a limited edition wattle lapel pin, which is a symbol of Australian resilience, strength, remembrance and reflection.

The importance of War Widows Day was also acknowledged on the social media accounts of Federal Member of Parliament Michael McCormack, NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet, The Daily Telegraph, RSL NSW and Legacy.



In the week following the event, local regional newspapers also wrote stories about the day, often interviewing local war widows.

The significant media coverage of the inaugural War Widows Day helped create greater understanding of the experiences and sacrifices of war widows, as well as the struggles you have faced and continue to face.

It is on this strong foundation of increased respect and understanding that AWWNSW continues to advocate for the needs and recognition of war widows.



War Widows honoured in NSW Parliament

As attendees at the inaugural War Widows Day service at Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park took part in the Star Ceremony, nearby in the NSW Parliament, Minister for Veterans, the Honourable David Elliot MP, gave a speech that lauded war widows.

Earlier, he had handed each Member of Parliament a War Widows Day Wattle Pin, which many wore as he delivered his speech.

He opened his speech by acknowledging the importance of War Widows Day and how it recognised the sacrifice of war widows and partners of Australian Defence Force members who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving Australia.

The Minister then went on to speak about how the War Widow's Guild was started by Jessie Vasey in June 1946, and how she built a support system for widows and advocated for them.

"It was Mrs Vasey's desire to put widows in touch with other similarly affected women and provide a meeting place for them," he said.

"Mrs Vasey worked tirelessly to ensure that war widows were recognised by governments in Australia and given the financial support and services they needed."

He recalled meeting with AWWNSW State President, Queen Dunbar, to discuss the need for a dedicated day to recognise, commemorate and honour war widows across New South Wales.

"On 20 August at the Vietnam Veterans Reception at Government House we took the opportunity, together with the Premier, to announce the Government's commitment to War Widows Day."

He acknowledged that there are some 15,000 surviving widows and widowers of servicemen and women across NSW.



While the majority honour the service of their partner in World War Two, there are also widows and widowers from the Vietnam War, Korean War, and East Timor, as well as contemporary conflicts such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and peacekeeping operations.

He also acknowledged the wattle pin and how it was reflective of war widows.

"The wattle is a symbol of Australian resilience, strength, remembrance, and reflection," the Minister said. "Those attributes are synonymous with our wonderful war widows."

He ended the speech by acknowledging AWWNSW members who would be attending the War Widows Day reception at Parliament House that evening, and honouring war widows and families within our communities.



"I specifically acknowledge Queen Dunbar, who is honouring her late husband, Adam," he said.

"He enlisted in the Australian Army in 1996 and saw active duty in the Solomon Islands in 2003, in Iraq in 2006 and in Afghanistan in 2011. Adam passed away in tragic circumstances in 2017.

"Ruth Payne and Peggy Archibald, who are both 96, are honouring the service of their partners in the Royal Australian Air Force during the Second World War.

"Mary Carter, who is 100, is representing her partner, who served in the Australian Army during the Second World War.

"As Minister for Veterans, and on behalf of all my parliamentary colleagues, many of whom will be joining me at the reception this afternoon, I am delighted to inaugurate War Widows Day, which acknowledges and honours the resilient families in our communities who have stoically faced enormous grief."

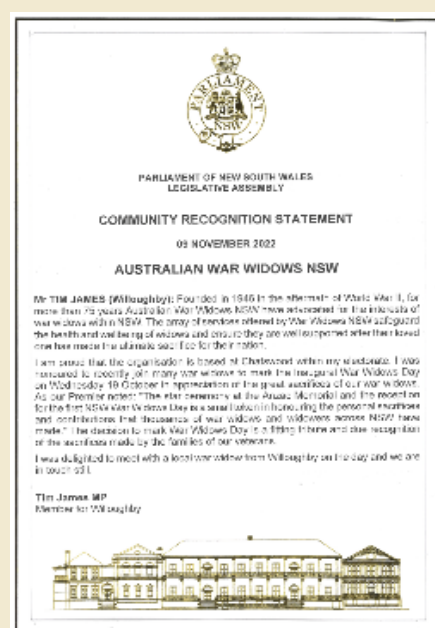


Local Member Honours Achievements

In November 2022, the achievements of AWWNSW and war widows across the state, past and present in having this day acknowledged in perpetuity were recognised.

In his Community Recognition Statement, the Tim James MP, Member for Willoughby reflected on his attendance at War Widows Day events and connections made with war widows in the Willoughby community.

We thank the local member for his ongoing support of AWWNSW and widows within his electorate.



INAUGURAL WAR WIDOWS DAY



Wednesday 19 October 2022 was the inaugural War Widows Day in NSW.

To mark the occasion, a service was held in the afternoon at Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park in Sydney.

The service included speeches by the Governor of NSW and AWWNSW Patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, State President Queen Dunbar, President of the Coogee Randwick War Widows Guild Margot Phillips, and Tricia Hobson, Board Chair, who read out a message from the Vasey Family.

Queen Dunbar shared her personal reflections on becoming a war widow. She said growing up she had envisioned meeting a Prince Charming, and together they would have children, travel the world and buy a house in the country.

She spoke about how her fairy tale was cut dramatically short when her husband died as a result of his defence service, and how she found herself struggling to identify as a war widow.

When she attended a contemporary War Widows forum, she realised she had met her tribe and found the most amazing group of women who have changed her life.

Margot Phillips, whose husband served in World War II, also spoke about her appreciation for AWWNSW and the wonderful friendships it has provided her.

Representing widows of her generation, she said that even though many war widows of World War Two are no longer around today, she was pleased that they, and all other war widows, were receiving the recognition they so wholeheartedly deserve.

The service also included a musical tribute by Aaron Elvis Richardson, who sang *Fly Me to the Moon*. He was later joined by the Australian Army Band to perform the Australian national anthem.

War widow Shirley McLaren read *The Ode of Remembrance*, while the service finished with a member of the Australian Army Band playing the *Last Post*, followed by a minute's silence.

Queen Dunbar then led the official party in participating in the Star Ceremony, which was a form of personal tribute kindly offered by the Anzac Memorial in support of War Widows Day.

In the Hall of Remembrance, guests were invited to write the name of a war widow or widower on a star and cast it to honour and recognise their contribution and sacrifice in defence of Australia. Our State President led the ceremony by casting a star in honour of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, who herself was a war widow.

The stars were then collected and cremated, and the ashes will be carried on pilgrimages undertaken by history students to the battlefields on which Australians have fallen.

There were many emotions on display throughout the service. Queen Dunbar, Margot Phillips and Jess Taylor, who emceed the service, all fought back tears as they spoke of their late husbands.

But what was most evident on the day was that war widows are strong, resilient and incredibly supportive of one another.

As well as the service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, war widow guilds and social clubs across NSW gathered to mark the day locally with morning teas, luncheons and a memorial dedication.



Over the next few pages we have, with permission from the authors published copies of key addresses provided as part of this incredibly moving service. We hope you enjoy reading through them.

Our special thanks to our photographer Hamilton Lund who documented the day for us.



Bujari gamarruwa Diyn Babana Gamarada Gadigal Ngura

I greet you in the language of the Gadigal people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

As Governor and Patron of Australian War Widows NSW it is a special honour to be with you as you take your place in the Anzac Memorial on this inaugural War Widows Day. In August, the Premier in announcing Widows Day said it would be “an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution and personal sacrifice made by more than 15,000 surviving widows and widowers of [servicemen and women] across New South Wales.”¹

This commemoration today, and on 19 October of every year, is and will continue to be a commemoration of sacrifice – the sacrifice mostly of women – who have been the recipients of the saddest message of their lives – a message of a loss of a life. From that time on the recipient of that message has had to rely on their own inward strength as they grieve. At the same time, they have had to support the grief of those around them, most especially their children.

The central place of your sacrifice in the sacrifice of war is captured in the sculpture which sits within the heart of the ANZAC Memorial. This sculpture by George Rayner Hoff, entitled *Sacrifice*, depicts a man killed in battle being returned to his family carried on his shield, by a mother, a sister, a wife, who cradles a child in her arms, reminiscent of the story of the Spartan warriors of ancient Greece.²

Hoff's works were recognised as highlighting the equality of women, their contribution to the war effort, and for the adversity experienced through the loss of fathers, husbands. His work also acknowledges the pain

felt by those who remain throughout the generations. This personal sacrifice is felt as acutely today by those mourning loved ones killed in modern conflicts just as it was following the First or Second World Wars.

It is the burden you have borne and bear from the first moment of that message that you did not want to receive.

No one can unburden you of your personal pain, but we can and do acknowledge that pain and support you. The dual acknowledgement – of your sacrifice captured in Hoff's work, and of your contribution, recognised in the dedication of this day as War Widow's Day – is as cherished as the acknowledgement of those who have lost their lives in or because of war.

Today's date was well chosen, the 125th birthdate of Jessie Vasey OBE CBE, the founder of Australian War Widows NSW, whose husband Major General Vasey was killed in a plane crash in World War Two, and whose family have sent a message to be shared with us later in this ceremony.

To Australian War Widows NSW, we pay tribute to you for your determination and persistence in ensuring that war widows and widowers have their proper recognition in our community. We give thanks for your courage, endurance perseverance and your sacrifice as we honour those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Lest we forget"

Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Governor of New South Wales

Ceremony to recognise War Widows on the occasion
of the Inaugural War Widows Day

Wednesday 19 October 2022

Anzac Memorial, Sydney

¹ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/war-widows>

² <https://www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au/memorial/explore-memorial/hall-silence/sacrifice>



“ I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and I would like to pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Your Excellency, War Widows and Widowers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

When I was a little girl, I used to dream of my Prince Charming, creating an imagined future and a blessed life full of love, laughter and happiness. My Prince Charming would be tall, handsome and dashing.

A true prince to my Queen.

We would fall in love, make plans to marry and proceed from there to build a life together.

We would buy a house, raise three amazing children, travel the world, grow old together, and one day retire to a lovely country house with a big backyard to allow for a game of cricket with all the grandchildren, who would come and stay with us over the school holidays.

I knew life would not always be so easy, and that we would encounter many challenges and face adversity along the way.

We would have disagreements over such things like the never-ending household chores or worries about the finances or even life-altering decisions over career choices.

What I never imagined was that I would be a widow, or to be more precise a war widow and at the young age of 41.

In all my daydreaming, I never imagined that I would fall in love with a soldier. With a man who found his calling serving his country.

I never dreamt that I would be living all around Australia, packing up and moving every couple of years to a new state and a new home, away from family and friends, starting again from scratch, searching for a new job and building a new support system.

But I did fall in love with a soldier and I did fulfil my childhood dreams of being a wife and mother.

And today, as I stand in front of you, I find myself adding war widow to my identity, a woman who lost her husband as a result of his Defence service.

My story is not unique or even unusual.

It is the ordinary story of the many thousands of women who have come before me.

It is the story of Jessie Vasey, OBE CBE, founder of the Australian War Widows Guild back in 1945 when she found herself in the same shoes that I find myself in today.

She understood the consequences of falling in love with a soldier and the sacrifices required to send her husband off to war, knowing that one day he might not come back.

She stood steadfast and waved goodbye to Major General Vasey as he travelled to New Guinea, comforting him with the knowledge that his wife and children are strong, resilient and will persevere during his absence.

She provided him with the peace of mind he needed to fight for his country, without worrying about issues back home.

So when tragedy struck and she found herself a war widow, Jessie Vasey did not let misfortune dictate her fate.

Instead, she identified a need in the community for an organisation that would provide practical help and peer-to-peer support for the thousands of women, lost in their grief and struggling with raising their children on their meagre pensions.

She established the War Widows' Guild, an organisation that has been the voice of war widows for the last 77 years and continues to do so through case management, service co-ordination, advocacy, social connections and peer support.

And today, on the 19th of October 2022, on Jessie Vasey's birthday, we come together to acknowledge her and your contributions and sacrifices.

Continued on Page 14 & 15...

... Continued from Page 13

We thank the NSW government for establishing War Widows Day, a day that pays tribute to all the war widows and widowers across this state who have borne the costs of war alongside their spouses and loved ones.

As we commemorate the inaugural War Widows Day, we laud the sacrifices of the many women and men, who have given their all to fortify their veteran husbands and wives when called upon for duty.

We honour your contributions, strengths and support you have provided our country and your communities. You have persevered through unimaginable grief and hardships, raising your children, and supporting yourselves and your families through heartaches and sorrows.

Today, as we thank you for your commitment and dedication to your families and your country, we give thanks to the previous generations of women and men that came before us and paved the way for us to be able to stand here together, strong, united, undivided, with a vision of marking this War Widows Day for future generations to come.

Your sacrifices have not been in vain.

We applaud you as we share your journey of fortitude and resilience. Your voices have been heard and your pain has been acknowledged.

There are over 103,000 names etched on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Those are the names of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. For every name etched on that wall, there are families – wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, children – who have suffered that loss, who have carried that sacrifice, who have lived that pain.

And then there are those who came home from the battlefield, mentally scarred and injured. They are alive but not living, here but not really present. It is the ugly, brutal cost of war. Breathing ghosts of the men and women, physically and mentally traumatised by their Defence service, straddling the world of both the living and the dead.

“We applaud you as we share your journey of fortitude and resilience. Your voices have been heard and your pain has been acknowledged.”

And as a wife and a family member, as you watch, helpless and powerless from the sidelines, your own mental health in tatters, your children living with words like triggers and flashbacks, you realise the hidden costs of war that no one talks about.

It is the trauma your family is living through, the intergenerational pain and suffering that you will bear going forth into the future.

Four years ago, when I lost my husband, I found myself floundering in a sea of despair.

My world was turned upside down and nothing made sense. This was not how my love story was supposed to end.

Whatever happened to raising our amazing children together or buying a house in the country?

Having a game of cricket and watching our grandchildren play?

We were only halfway through the fairy tale.

This was not the happily ever after I had imagined.

One day, amidst this depth of anger and despair, I received a phone call to attend a Contemporary Widows Forum.

I remember thinking I had nothing to contribute.

As it was, I was just getting my head around being a widow. I hated that word, I resented this new label and I struggled to adapt to my new identity.

Four years later, I am thankful I attended the forum that fateful day.

As Gwen Cherne, DVA's Veteran Family Advocate, would say, I found my tribe.

I met the most amazing group of women that have forever changed my life. Jennifer Collins, Meg Green, Rhondda Vanzella, Renee Wilson, Bree Till and the many others who are the face of Australian War Widows NSW and who represent the thousands of members this organisation supports and advocates for and on their behalf, every day across our beautiful state of NSW, and Australia at large.

These women are the current torch bearers of the flame that was first lit by Jessie Vasey back in 1945.

As we celebrate her today, the significance of this day and this moment is only possible because of her selflessness and empathy.

This organisation that she started is the only organisation that has been built by veterans' families for veterans' families, and is also led by veterans' families.

It is an organisation that understands that by supporting veterans' families, it is enabling and empowering them to live their best lives.

As I stand here before you today, I am humbled by your strength and sacrifice in the face of adversity.

While the definition of war widows and widowers might have changed over the years, one thing has not and that is your endurance to stand strong and true, serving alongside your veterans and loved ones.

You may not have worn the uniform and you may not have been recognised with medals and monuments, but you have stood for over one hundred years, stoically and silently, supporting your spouses, praying for their safe return while keeping the faith back home.



As I pay my deepest respects to the many that came before me, I want to also pay my respects to you, you who are still standing up and fighting for change.

I honour you all who are widowed by war and Defence services and I acknowledge and pay tribute to all your sacrifices and those of your families.

Thank you."

Queen Dunbar

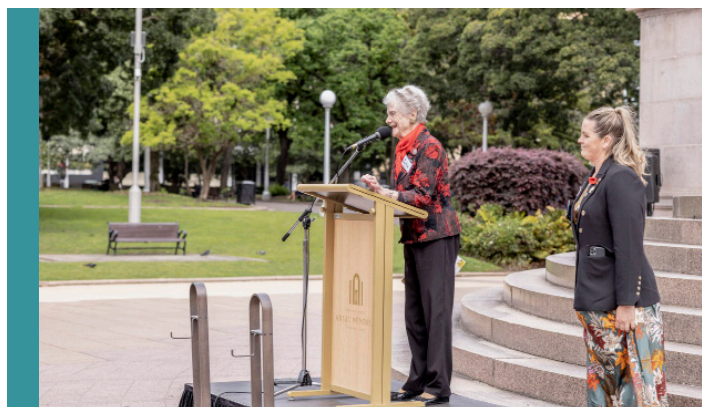
Australian War Widows NSW State President

Wednesday, 19 October 2022

Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park



"You may not have worn the uniform and you may not have been recognised with medals and monuments, but you have stood for over one hundred years, stoically and silently, supporting your spouses, praying for their safe return while keeping the faith back home."



"There is yet another generation of war widows. It has been with heavy hearts but open arms that we have welcomed them into organisations such as ours, such as the Australian War Widows NSW."

It is a great honour and privilege to have the opportunity to speak with you today. It brings me immense satisfaction that for the very first time, we are honouring the contributions and sacrifices of war widows in defence of Australia. I became a war widow in 2009 when my husband, Bruce, who had served in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War Two, passed away. Soon after my husband's death, I was contacted by a member of the Coogee Randwick War Widow' Guild Social Club. She invited me to attend their next monthly meeting, which I did. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other war widows. In fact, I appreciated it so much that soon after that first meeting, I found myself elected President, which is a role I have occupied ever since.

As President of the Coogee Randwick War Widow's Guild Social Club, I have been blessed to get to know, on a very personal level, many of the local war widows.

I came to know their struggles. I heard stories of how some women struggled emotionally and financially to raise their children on their own after their husbands were killed in the war or died following the war from their injuries.

I got to know their strength. I was in awe of how some women supported and advocated for their husbands in the years after the war, as their husbands battled with mental scars and physical injuries.

I got to know their selflessness. I came to understand how these women, for so much of their lives, put everyone's needs before their own—the needs of our nation, of their husbands and of their families. These remarkable women, the families of veterans, may have never seen war, but they are part of Australia's war efforts.

They have played a part in our nation's story of defending freedom and our way of life. They have, without question, contributed and sacrificed in

defence of Australia. I'm pleased that today we recognise and acknowledge that contribution and sacrifice. Many war widows of my generation, of the Second World War, are no longer with us today. But I'm pleased that in some small way, I can represent them here.

I'm pleased that they, and all other war widows, are receiving the recognition they so wholeheartedly deserve. Every generation of war widows hopes that they will be the last. We hope that the next generation will not know the same pain and suffering of war.

Unfortunately, we are yet to see that day. With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is yet another generation of war widows. It has been with heavy hearts but open arms that we have welcomed them into organisations such as ours, such as the Australian War Widows NSW.

For more than 70 years the War Widows' Guild has connected women who have experienced the same devastating loss, and it's provided them with support and a group of friends who have the same shared experience of supporting a war veteran. Today, of all days, I'm incredibly grateful for this wonderful organisation and the friendships it has provided me. And I'm grateful that from today onward, every year, on the 19th of October, New South Wales will acknowledge the tremendous contribution and sacrifice of war widows, both past and present, in the defence of Australia.

Thank you."

Margot Phillips
Coogee Randwick
War Widows Club Coordinator
Wednesday, 19 October 2022
Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park



It is my honour as Chair of Australian War Widows NSW to read a statement from the Vasey family on this historic day.

Before I get to that I want to echo the sentiments we have already heard about Jessie Vasey and her legacy. More than 76 years ago, Jessie started more than just an organisation – she started a movement.

A movement that resulted in widows being included in the veteran system.

We continue this legacy by advocating and supporting all veterans' families. At Australian War Widows NSW, we are a place where everyone belongs., Wwe are a family for those that have lost theirs, for those whose families are not what they once were, and for those whose families are forever changed by military service.

Now the statement from the Vasey Family, to ours, written by Dr Jennifer St George (PhD), eldest daughter of Robert Vasey, second son of Jessie and George.

"To the War Widows of New South Wales and to your families and loved ones.

I would like to extend my thoughts and well wishes to you on this day.

This day honours each woman's spirit and their journey through distress and strain upon the loss of their life partner through service to the Australian nation.

For some years before my grandmother, Jessie Vasey, founded the War Widows' Guild, widows of the war were being contacted and supported in some ways by community and service organisations.

But my grandmother upped the ante, so to speak. She tasked herself to generate respect and responsibility towards widows from the politicians of the day. And in this, she was very successful, if not a little controversial along the way.

I think part of the determination which brought about The War Widows' Guild and Vasey Housing was a particular philosophy: both Jessie and the Major General recognised the importance of having a "place in the world, recognised and guaranteed by others", as described by French author, Simone Weil.

My grandparents built their own family life around this philosophy. Children, animals, gardens, furniture and knick-knacks, were all part of it, whether in Quetta, Sydney or Melbourne. Jessie's place in the family world was as a loved intimate one, a parenting partner, and a confidante.

So, the loss of this place was a turning point in her life. And as it is a turning point in your lives. War Widows Day, now to be honoured each year, will be one more opportunity for us to provoke action against violence and warfare, and collective security. "We all belong to each other. We all need each other ... for our common good."

Thank you."

Tricia Hobson

Board Chair, Australian War Widows NSW

Statement from the Vasey Family

Wednesday, 19 October 2022

Anzac Memorial, Sydney



Witnessing a historic day

Conversation about War Widows
Day with member and war widow,
Margaret Tanner.

At 102 years old, Margaret Tanner was one of the oldest war widows at the War Widows Day service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney.

Getting there was no easy feat for Margaret. She travelled by taxi to Hyde Park, and then walked a few hundred metres to Anzac Memorial with only a walking stick to support her.

But nothing was going to stop Margaret from witnessing this historic moment. Margaret has been a member of AWWNSW for more than 70 years, since 1951. She knows intimately what War Widows Day means to so many war widows.

She knows respect for war widows and recognition of our sacrifices has been long fought for and hard won. Margaret says all these years as a member of AWWNSW has been worth it to be recognised like this – to be recognised with War Widows Day.

She says the day is important because it makes people aware of war widows, and also brings together war widows from different generations.

“It brings different people together with their different stories and it allows older war widows to talk to younger war widows and help them through their challenges,” she says.



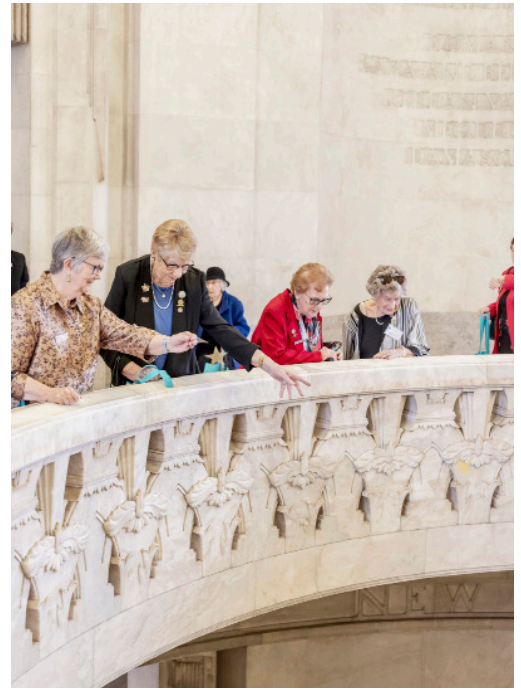
While waiting after the service for the bus to take them to the War Widows Day reception at Parliament House, Margaret had the chance to talk to younger war widows. She listened to what life was like for them, which reminded her of her own life.

Margaret's husband died in 1949. They were both 29 years old at the time, and had a young son who was about to turn three. She said listening to the experiences of younger war widows reminded her of what it was like when she too was a young war widow, raising her son without her husband.

She also enjoyed catching up with old friends, and even managed to get her photo taken with the Premier of NSW, the Honourable Dominic Perrottet MP.

Margaret says she was very happy to be part of the day and found it very enjoyable. She hopes her health allows her to take part in War Widows Day again this year.

**“It brings different people
together with their different
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NSW Govt. reception

Reflections from our CEO, Renee Wilson, on the reception hosted by the Minister for Veterans, the Honourable David Elliot, at the NSW Parliament House



Walking into to the Speakers Garden at NSW Parliament House, you would not have necessarily thought that the Minister for Veterans, the Honourable David Elliot, was hosting war widows. The Garden was alive with energy, conversation, laughter and connection as old friends caught up, new friends were made, and members of parliament from around NSW learned more about the burdens war widows carry.

It was a beautiful and relaxing end to a very big and important day. In observing the crowd, I couldn't help but think back to that incredible subheading from No Peacetime Cinderellas: "Remarkable achievements by a remarkable 'pack of women'".

Here before me were 100 of the most remarkable women I have ever met, women who like you have faced the worst thing that any spouse of a veteran can ever imagine. Yet here they are, smiling again and enjoying the fruits of all their hard work over many, many years, not only with our organisation but in their communities.

Before me were incredible examples of pure resilience! Women who, despite their gender and the barriers society had placed before them over the years, found each other, helped each other and inspired each other. What an incredible gift.

I saw widows from all generations connecting through their unique lived experience. I

saw them teach the members of their NSW Parliament about what it was like to walk in their shoes. I saw them provide truly frank and fearless feedback! It was hard not to be inspired.

And, just when you thought that your heart could not fill any more, we heard from our State President, Queen Dunbar. At the end of her address, I wanted to rise to my feet and give her the standing ovation she deserved for her vulnerability and insightful telling of her story – yet I was already on my feet, so I clapped as high and loud as I could.

The reception in many ways reminded me of ANZAC Day, of walking into a crowded pub where veterans are catching up and sharing stories. But this time the widows were not the wallflowers – they were front and centre. This was their day and AWWNSW together with the NSW Government couldn't be prouder to make it happen for them.

Our sincere thanks to the NSW Government and the NSW Veterans Minister, the Honourable David Elliot, for being a champion of this cause, for recognising our nation's widows, and for hosting them during the afternoon reception. I'd also like to offer our thanks to the NSW Office for Veterans for their support in the lead up to the day, and in delivering the reception for us.

I'd also like to recognise all of you in this 'remarkable pack of women' on whose shoulders AWWNSW now stands. Without you, and without the momentum you created and sustained, War Widows Day would not have been possible.



Bass Hill War Widows Day Service

A service was held in the afternoon of 19 October 2022 at the War Widows Memorial in Walshaw Park in Bass Hill to mark the inaugural War Widows Day.

Attending the service was the Mayor of Canterbury Bankstown, Khal Asfour, who gave a speech, as well as councillors, and representatives from Bankstown RSL sub-branch. Members of AWWNSW's Bankstown Guild were also present, including board member and chair, Jennifer Collins, who also delivered a speech.

The mood at the service was a mix of appreciation for this day of recognition, as well as sadness and grief because of the passing only days earlier of local war widow Norma Holdorf, known as Pat.

The Mayor of Bankstown acknowledged Pat's contribution to the local community and said she was a fierce advocate for local war widows.

As part of the War Widows Day service, a wreath was laid to honour Pat, while another wreath was laid to honour all war widows, past and present. The War Widows Day service also saw the unveiling of a monument dedicated to AWWNSW and named in Pat's honour, featuring our kookaburra emblem.

Jennifer Collins said the establishment of a monument to Australian War Widows NSW along the Remembrance Drive was significant, especially as it is the first of its kind in NSW.

As the President of AWWNSW's Bankstown Guild, Pat had been instrumental in the monument being erected and local war widows recognised. Bankstown Guild Treasurer Myra Lucas told Cindy Lynch from the Bankstown Torch that they were all saddened that Pat had missed the first War Widows Day.



Pat's daughters, Gail Marshall and Roby Batson, also told the publication how much War Widows Day had meant to their mum.

"Even from her hospital bed last week, she was making sure that Robyn and I had been in contact with the Mayor, we had arranged that the garden here [at the monument] was swept, and she was getting us to ensure that people who were invited were coming ... even though I guess she knew she probably wasn't going to make it herself," said Gail.

Pat's sad passing was a timely reminder that War Widows Day belonged to all widows and widowers, both past and present. It belonged just as much to the women who had been issued a 'First World War Mothers' and Widows' badge, as it belonged to younger war widows who were wearing their late husbands' medals at the War Widows Day service at Anzac Memorial.





The inaugural War Widows Day was years in the making, and with great thanks to the tireless actions and advocacy of countless women across several generations; women like Pat Holdorf and Jessie Vasey, who dedicated their lives to supporting women widowed from war, and advocating for recognition and better support.

During the service, the Mayor acknowledged the importance of the day, as well as the contribution of widows and the families of veterans.

"This is a day to remember widows and recognise that veterans' families are as much a part of the defence force as veterans themselves," he said.



"This is a day to remember widows and recognise that veterans' families are as much a part of the defence force as veterans themselves."



Pat Holdorf OAM

Pat was one of a kind. She served her community with distinction and was a proud AWWNSW member. Pat was the President of War Widows Bankstown and was instrumental in the placement of a memorial to the War Widows' Guild of NSW in Bass Hill.

On 19 October 2022, the inaugural War Widows Day, the park where the memorial is located was named after Pat, in recognition of her contributions to her community.

Thank you, Pat, for your service and dedication to AWWNSW. May you now rest in peace.

Jennifer Collins echoed this sentiment in her own speech.

"War widows have long been part of the fabric of NSW. Alongside veteran families, widows continue to be vital to the veteran community. While the definitions of war widows have changed over time, one thing certainly hasn't, and that is their sacrifices," she said.

Following the service and the unveiling of the monument, war widows and invited guests headed back to Bankstown RSL to further mark the occasion together.

As Myra Lucas told the Bankstown Torch, "Pat never got to see the plaque dedication, but the rain held off and it was a nice afternoon spent later at the Bankstown RSL enjoying the club's complimentary refreshments."



All around NSW, many of our clubs organised different events for members and local widows to mark the inaugural War Widows Day. Some clubs coordinated transfers for their members so they could attend the ceremony at the memorial or other clubs' events.

"I felt it was most important for our ladies to celebrate War Widows Day in person," said Lynne Boyd, AWWNSW board member and coordinator of the City Saturday Social Club. Some of them attended the Anzac Memorial service and the Parliament House function. Lynne was especially delighted to see Ms Margaret Tanner at the event, who came by taxi and then attended the function at Parliament House – Margaret is 102 years young.

For the inaugural event, it was pleasing to see 28 club-based events stand up at short notice to mark the day.

Morning teas were held by several clubs to celebrate the day, including Bay & Basin, Clarence Valley and The Entrance & Long Jetty social clubs. Members from the Port Macquarie Guild and Wauchope Social Club marked War Widows Day 2022 with a combined morning tea, the Orange Social Club members were invited at the Legacy House and the Penrith ladies were invited at their local RSL to recognise the day with a morning tea.

Members of the Coogee Social Club enjoyed a special luncheon overlooking the beach at the Coogee Legion Club, while members of the Murwillumbah Social Club celebrated with a luncheon at the Murwillumbah Services Club attended by representatives of the RSL and Legacy.

The ladies of the Penshurst War Widows Social Club joined together for lunch followed by a slice of butter cake.

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends of All Saints Church, the Parramatta club members were offered a lovely lunch at Club Paramatta followed by a cake made by member Jackie Clarke.

The City of Greater Wollongong social club organised a ceremony at their memorial, before a lovely lunch at the club. This was covered by WIN News, who interviewed members Anne Morley, Karen Marceau and club co-ordinator Pam Bowmaker.

Another ceremony was organised by the North Ryde Social Club and held at the North Ryde RSL in their remembrance rose garden. Ceremony was followed by lunch provided by the RSL.

Some clubs organised events later in the day, such as the Yass Social Club afternoon tea or the Goulburn Social Club's afternoon tea and reflection, which was held at the Goulburn Soldiers Club.

The celebrations of the day continued later in the year during some regional catch ups: in Ulladulla, the Bay & Basin, Moruya and Ulladulla Social Clubs recognised the day once again with special guests. Following the lunch held at the Club that day, a sponge cake was enjoyed in celebration of the inaugural War Widows Day.

We would like to thank all the club members and coordinators who organised events on this day at relatively short notice. A special mention to the Foster Tuncurry and the Wallsend clubs who had previously closed but who re-gathered on this day to connect with each other. The Wallsend Social Club has started meeting again, prompted by War Widows Day. We are encouraged to see how War Widows Day has helped to bring a renewed sense of purpose to our clubs network, and look forward to that continuing well into the future.

As Lynne said, "it was an unanimous decision that it was a perfect day, showing the result of all the hard work that was put in to organise it and hope that we can repeat the occasion for many years to come."

Thanks Lynne – we couldn't agree more!

WAR WIDOWS DAY ACROSS NSW



Bay and Basin WWD Morning Tea



Clarence Valley WW Day Morning Tea



Goulburn Social Club's afternoon tea



Yass War Widows Social Club afternoon tea



North Ryde Social Club ceremony at the RSL memorial



Newcastle Social Club lunch



Parramatta Social Club ladies at Club Paramatta



Penshurst War Widows Social Club lunch

The impact of a special day

As previously covered in this edition, media coverage was extensive, and the event was well publicised throughout the country.

Before, during and after the event, the day was talked about on various media channels. Below is a summary of the key facts and estimated reach of the media coverage.

Altogether, articles covering the announcement of War Widows Day – with some featuring war widows Meg Green and Barbara Robinson – were published across 22 papers and had an estimated reach of close to 9.6 million readers.

The announcement was also covered on radio on various occasions on the ABC network, reaching an estimated audience of 115,600 people. Broadcasts included “Mornings with Kia Handley” and “Mornings with Nick Rheinberger”.

The day was covered in multiple newspapers featuring interviews with our State President, Queen Dunbar. These articles were published across four newspapers and reached an estimated 30.9 million readers.

Defence Connect published an article about the day that had an estimated reach of 34,900 readers.

Throughout the country, numerous local newspapers covered the day, such as Coffs Coast News Of the Area, Coast Community News, the Regional Independent, the National Tribune, the Mirage, Nepean News, Local



News Plus, Hills of Hawkesbury and many more. We estimated a reach within local papers of 555,000 readers.

The WIN Network aired a story on the day featuring interviews with our CEO, Renee Wilson, and with war widows Anne Morley, Karen Marceau and Pam Bowmaker. This story reached an estimated 40,000 viewers.

Also on the day, radio broadcasts including most of the ABC network as well as 2GB, 2CC, 2CA, 2Web, 2UE and 2NUR reached an estimated audience of 484,300 people.

The day was also well covered in social media, not only on our AWWNSW pages, but also on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts, including the Australian War Memorial, the Premier of NSW, the Daily Telegraph,

Scan the QR code to watch the WIN Network story on War Widows Day





The purpose of War Widows Day is to recognise war widows and widowers in NSW, and honour their contributions and sacrifices.

In 2022, we marked the first day honouring the significance of the sacrifices made by veterans' families in service of Australia. War widows and veterans' families have been part of the fabric of NSW, making a valuable contribution to our communities since World War One.

While definitions of war widows have changed over time one thing hasn't, and that is their sacrifices – your sacrifices.

Together, war widows have created a community that has helped so many, offering support, guidance, and a group to lean on in times of need.

So on 19 October annually, we now gather to acknowledge and pay tribute to your sacrifices, and those that came before. We honour war widows of every generation and state, we honour the role and sacrifices of their families, and we honour the sacrifices veterans' families make every day, prior to the worst happening. This is our day, it is your day, and together, we are as much a part of the veteran community as veterans themselves.



About War Widows Day 2022

In 2022, there were multiple ways to get involved including:

- attending AWWNSW's War Widows Day service at the Anzac Memorial Hyde Park
- attending a war widows club or hosting a morning tea for war widows in your area
- purchasing a wattle badge – show your support for war widows by buying a badge, with funds raised supporting the delivery of our social connections program
- buying a coffee for a war widow – all funds raised will support our social connections program and support guild and social clubs.

We look forward to building off this and growing participation in all areas over the coming years.



FAQs

ABOUT WAR WIDOWS DAY 2022

Why was the wattle chosen as the symbol of War Widows Day?

Wattle is a symbol of Australian resilience, strength, remembrance and reflection. Young design student Nidhi Bolar hand designed and drew this wattle for AWWNSW's 75th anniversary in 2021.

The wattle represents the spirit of the Australian people. It became a tradition during World War One to press and send wattle to wounded soldiers, and fallen soldiers were buried with sprigs of wattle.

Why was the date of 19 October chosen for War Widows Day?

19 October is significant day for war widows across the country. It is a day that belongs to every widow, as it is the birthday of Australian War Widows founder Mrs Jessie Vasey OBE CBE.

Jessie started more than just an organisation to support war widows and advocate for their needs. She created a community and a movement – one that resulted in widows being included in the veteran system. At AWWNSW we look forward to extending this vision to all veterans' families.

Were other organisations involved in War Widows Day in NSW?

RSL NSW was engaged in the day and helped to amplify messages on social media and in communications. Many subbranches also helped to put on morning teas for war widows in their areas.

What was the result of the Pin sale and Buy a Widow a coffee campaign?

By the end of War Widows Day, more than 300 pins were sold. Buy a Widow a Coffee raised \$1,525 throughout October (\$30.50/club).

How many people attended the service at the Anzac Memorial?

120 people registered to attend, and 100 attended (plus members of the public).

How many club hosted events happened on the day?

In total, 13 community events were registered, all of which were related to AWWNSW clubs hosting events.



Do you have a question you would like answered?

Please send them through the post, via email or give us a call.

We'd love to hear from you.





The Minister with Member for Macquarie, Susan Templeman at a Veterans' and Families' Hub consultation event in Windsor NSW in December.

2023 will be a year of improved services, support and benefits for the veteran community; as measures and initiatives to address cost of living pressures and enhance family wellbeing kick off.

You know better than anyone of the sacrifices made by current and former Australian Defence Force personnel when they serve our country. These burdens are shouldered by their families as well.

Thank you to all our war widows for the sacrifice you and your families shoulder as a consequence of your loved ones' service.

The Albanese Government is committed to delivering a package of practical support measures that will improve the welfare of veterans and families, now and into the future.

We have already:

- expanded the services available to families in times of crisis with the Defence, Veterans' and Families Acute Support Package
- increased the Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) payment by \$1,000
- begun recruiting an additional 500 staff for the Department of Veterans' Affairs
- and responded to the Interim Report from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is also continuing its important work. I want to thank Australian War Widows NSW for making a submission and providing testimony to the Royal Commission regarding the experience of widows, women and families. I appreciate the courage it takes to share those experiences.

I responded, on behalf of Government to the Interim Report in September, and we are committed to enacting its recommendations. We are in the process of engaging

500 new frontline staff at DVA to help eliminate the compensation claims backlog and improving ICT systems to support them. We are also developing a pathway to simplify and harmonise complex veterans legislation that everyone agrees is an absolute headache. We're working to ensure that veterans and veteran families receive the services and supports they need, much faster.

Under the leadership of the new Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, we'll see a renewed focus on service delivery.

There are a variety of new programs and initiatives rolling out this year.

We'll release the very first Defence and Veteran Family Support Strategy, recognising the experience of defence and veteran families, and the role families play in supporting a serving, or formally serving member.

The national expansion of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs is also well underway. I had the honour of opening the Nowra Veterans' and Families' Hub in Nowra in December and now face-to-face consultations on new Hubs around the country are in full swing. It's input from groups like yours that will help shape what these Hubs look like around the country.

I know communities want access to services close to home. We're not taking a cookie cutter approach. We're keen to hear from locals about what services and information they need, and how these Hubs can best serve them.

This year we'll also be delivering on our \$24 million Veteran Employment Program. This will not only support defence personnel as they transition to civilian life, it will also champion the opportunity of employing a veteran, or a veteran family member in the civilian workplace.

Since the War Widows' Guild was founded in 1946, a robust community has grown; built on compassion, support and a fiery determination to advocate for the rights of every war widow. In part, it is through this advocacy that our war widows have shown their strength and support for each other as part of our veteran community.

I congratulate you on your successful inaugural War Widows Day in October. And finally, I would like to thank everyone at Australian War Widows NSW for the important contribution you make to our veteran and family community.

THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
Minister for Defence Personnel
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Supported and understood

Closing reflections from member Michelle Carr on War Widows Day and its meaning.

When my husband died in 2015, it felt like a black line was drawn through my life. Forevermore my life would be split into two parts: life with Matt and life without him.

In the immediate years after Matt's death, grief weighed heavily on me – and it still does in many ways.

I had known Matt my entire life. We grew up together in Dubbo. We went to high school together. There is even a photo of us together when we were two. We had known each other for that long.

The future without Matt felt uncertain, scary and lonely – lonely in the sense I had to do life without my best friend, soul mate and father of my children, and also lonely in the sense that it felt like no one else in the world felt like I did.

Of course, that's not true. There are many women who have lost their husbands, and there are many women like me, like us: war widows.

In NSW, there are some 15,000 war widows and more than 40,000 across the country. When I joined AWWNSW in 2019 I found more than just an organisation to support me – I found a place where it felt like I belonged.

In the company of other war widows, I felt understood. I knew you felt what I felt. While we are all on individual journeys, we share the similar experience of losing our husbands.

When I first heard there would be an annual War Widows Day, I felt very proud and visible. Finally, there was a day that acknowledges the huge sacrifices of widows and widowers of members of the Australian Defence Force.



On the inaugural War Widows Day, I was fortunate to attend the special service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney. I thought all the speeches given were moving and powerful.

After the service, I was given a gold-coloured commemorative star. I had a long pause and moment of reflection during the 'star ceremony', when I released this commemorative star and I watched it drift into the Well of Contemplation in the Hall of Memory at the War Memorial.

I then attended the special reception at the NSW Parliament House, where I was able to meet, relax and reconnect with other war widows. I feel very lucky to have found a group of women who are so very strong and supportive, and who understand what this journey is like.

I find other war widows so inspiring. I was chatting to a lady who was 92 years old and plays golf twice a week. For the younger war widows like me, seeing other war widows doing okay – getting on with their lives – gives me strength and hope that the kids and I will be okay in the future.

The day felt very different to Anzac Day, Remembrance Day, and other significant commemorations where I am usually filled with a heavy sadness and loss. War Widows Day felt lighter and special. While my emotions were still a bit of a rollercoaster, mostly I felt proud, welcome, supported and understood.

I look forward to finding out what AWWNSW has planned to mark War Widows Day this year.

