



FAMILIES
OF VETERANS GUILD
Owned by Australian War Widows NSW Ltd

AUTUMN 2026

THE GUILD DIGEST

SPECIAL EDITION ANZAC FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE & ANZAC DAY



AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS NSW LIMITED

Trading as
FAMILIES OF VETERANS GUILD

ABN 24 083 075 914

www.familiesofveterans.org.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
**Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret
Beazley AC KC**, Governor of New South Wales

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THE DIGEST

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apologise most sincerely.

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FOR YOUR DIARY

Wellbeing activities

Air dry clay workshop - online
3 June 2026

Writing through grief - online
11 June 2026

Wellbeing walk - Sydney
12 June 2026

Wellbeing walk - Canberra
12 June 2026

Craft and afternoon tea - Sydney
13 June 2026

Key dates

**80th Anniversary of Australian War
Widows Guild NSW (1946)**
4 June 2026

**Formation of Australian Squadrons
in Bomber Command (1941)**
5 June 2026

**D Day, Liberation of Europe
Commenced (1944)**
6 June 2026

King's Birthday
8 June 2026

**Battle of Shah Wali Kot,
Afghanistan (2010)**
10-15 June 2026

**Black Hawk Helicopter Tragedy
(1996)**
12 June 2026

Mindful colouring evening - online
18 June 2026

Paint & dine together - Townsville
19 June 2026

Sound immersion - Townsville
20 June 2026

**Cook & connect: veteran family
dinner - online**
25 June 2026

Origami workshop - Canberra
26 June 2026

International Widows' Day
23 June 2026

Reserve Forces Day
1 July 2026

**Formation of Royal Australian Navy
(1911)**
10 July 2026

Battle of Fromelles (1916)
19 July 2026

**Arrival of RAMSI Forces in
Solomon Islands (2003)**
24 July 2026

Korean Veterans' Day
27 July 2026

Vietnam Veterans' Day
18 August 2026

CONTENT

- 03 President's message
- 04 Chair's message
- 05 Minister for Veterans' Affairs
- 06 NSW Minister for Veterans
- 07 Membership update
- 08 Advocacy update
- 09 Entitlements update
- 12 ANZAC Field of Remembrance
- 20 Regional gatherings
- 22 ANZAC Day 2026
- 26 Wellbeing update
- 28 South Australia update
- 29 Member notices
- 30 Noticeboard

HIGHLIGHTS





Queen Dunbar (left) laying her cross alongside former President Wendy Thompson at the 74th ANZAC Field of Remembrance.

Welcome to our special edition of *The Guild Digest*, covering our 74th annual ANZAC Field of Remembrance held on 23 April in Sydney. Many of you were among the 140 guests who joined us at St Andrew's Cathedral, and many of you gathered to watch the service live streamed in Coffs Harbour, Albury, Laurieton, and Yass, whilst others joined us online from the comfort of their homes.

Remembrance is a meaningful word; a broad word, albeit an intimate one. A word that can mean so many different things to so many different people. For many of us it is a word heavy with significance, full of love, devotion and pride. How we remember is very personal, and yet collectively, remembrance is transformed into a commemoration like this ANZAC Field of Remembrance.

Created by war widows to remember their veteran loved ones ahead of ANZAC Day, the ANZAC Field of Remembrance has become a 74-year-old tradition — one that provides a space for widows and families to reflect and remember. For them, remembrance is looking back at the past, marking it, and carrying forward the memories, the love, the lessons, and the little things that made their veterans so incredibly special.

We remember our loved ones every day. We are the keepers of their legacy; we are the ones who carry them in our hearts, in our actions and in our prayers. Our veterans live within us, within our children, our nieces and nephews, our grandchildren, and in every generation yet to come.

On ANZAC Day, Australia remembers our veterans. But for us, every day is ANZAC Day.

A song on the radio, the smell of gardenias, a laugh, a sentence they used to say often, the footy team they supported — these are the ways they stay with us, in moments no history book will ever capture.

The ANZAC Field of Remembrance is where that love takes shape in the most intimate and yet public of ways — tributes adorned with a message, a drawing, a private joke, a memory. Timeless tokens of the love we hold.

This year, as our organisation turns 80, we remember our incredible war widows who fought so hard to be seen and heard. The women who created a space for all of us to connect and come together — not standing on the sidelines as a stranger lays a wreath, but standing here, at the altar, laying a personal tribute to our veteran we will love, always.

As we celebrate this milestone, I remember all of you whose lives have been impacted by defence service, and who live on carrying that impact, the memories, and the sacrifices.

If you have not seen the ANZAC Field of Remembrance service, I encourage you to watch the recording by scanning the QR code on page 13 of this edition of *The Guild Digest*.

MS QUEEN DUNBAR
President

CHAIR'S MESSAGE



From left to right: CEO Renee Wilson, Board Directors Lyn Bye, Yvonne Stapleton, State President Queen Dunbar, Board Directors Michelle Carr, Lynne Sullivan, BRIG Jocelyn King CSC, and Board Chair Tricia Hobson.

As we move further into the year I've been reflecting on how much we have grown as an organisation in strength, connection and purpose. Our team has been working steadily behind the scenes to support all of that momentum and as we close out our financial year, we're taking stock of the past 12 months. I look forward to sharing what we've achieved together at our AGM in August.

This year, the Board aims to connect with as many members as possible, including those in regional areas. Traditionally, the AGM has provided us with the forum to do this, however we are conscious that travel isn't as easy for many of you as it once was. With this in mind, we have decided to take our October Board meeting on the road and head up to the Mid North Coast of NSW to engage with a large concentration of members who live in that region. We are still developing the plans and when they are finalised, we will be sure to let local members know.

This activity builds on our member feedback initiative which I introduced

in 2025 to bring the Board closer to members. Throughout the course of 2025 the Board heard from 5 members, and we look forward to hearing from many more this year. These sessions have proven very valuable and seen us adjust our brand positioning and ensure wellbeing activities are being communicated to war widows. Renee and the team are also delivering a series of information sessions suggested by members and in 2026 we will be reintroducing President's Representatives to support the organisation's ceremonial participation. These initiatives are a direct result of the member feedback sessions at Board meetings and demonstrate our commitment to ensuring members are seen and heard.

On 4 June, we will turn 80 years old, having officially formed the War Widows Guild of NSW on 4 June 1946. 80 years of service to the community and each other is an incredible milestone, and plans are currently being worked on to mark this special occasion all throughout our 80th year. This milestone also cements the organisation in Australia's

history, making us the oldest and largest remaining war widows-based organisation in the country. As custodians of the war widows' and Vasey legacy, our role today has never been more important and our work is far from over. In addition to protecting the interests of war widows and servicing their needs, our support and advocacy has extended to support families of veterans before bereavement – fulfilling a critical gap in the veteran system of care. We do this at a local, state and from 2026 a national level.

In late 2025, the Board was advised of War Widows National's intention to voluntarily wind up the organisation. The Board has resolved to expand our advocacy function to fulfil the role, obligations and functions that War Widows National will leave behind. With many past National Presidents in our membership, I understand news of the voluntary wind up is difficult to hear, but I do hope you find comfort in knowing this national legacy is now in safe hands and will continue beyond the wind up of that association. Just as we have done with War Widows South Australia, we will ensure that the gap left behind by War Widows National is fulfilled and war widows do not lose their seat at the table. A seat that was hard fought for.

At the moment the Board is very focused on ensuring the organisation has the resources it needs to deliver on its promise, its activities and grow sustainably. We are working on an updated strategic plan for the organisation which seeks to provide a plan to guide the organisation through its next phase, and I look forward to sharing this with you at the AGM in August. Until then stay warm and stay safe over winter.

MS TRICIA HOBSON
Board Chair



Minister Keogh walked the Kokoda Track to attend this year's ANZAC Day Dawn Service at Isurava, Papua New Guinea.

Across the country and around the world, we remembered all those who have worn our nation's uniform — and their families—at ANZAC Day services and events.

I'm told that once again, your ANZAC Field of Remembrance service at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney was extremely moving and saw the families of veterans lay tributes to their loved ones ahead of ANZAC Day.

This year, I was fortunate to spend ANZAC Day at the Isurava Memorial in Papua New Guinea. There I was able to join with around 200 other Australians and Papua New Guineans in remembering all those who fought and died on the Kokoda Track and across PNG and the significant contribution they made to ultimate victory in the Second World War. We also paid tribute to the families of those who served there and acknowledged the enduring grief of the loved ones of those who never came home. I also visited the Bomana, Lae and Bita Paka War Cemeteries in PNG, the final resting place of thousands of Commonwealth men and women who never made it home from the fighting

in WWII. These were another powerful reminder of the incredible sacrifices made by those in uniform but the families left grieving at home.

Days of reflection and remembrance such as ANZAC Day bring into sharp focus the need to ensure our current veterans and families of veterans receive the care, recognition and opportunities they deserve.

From 1 July, veterans and families of veterans will see significant changes to the way they are supported, changes that come in response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. For example, the new, enhanced Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA) will come into effect as a single ongoing legislative basis for entitlements, replacing the current complex web of multiple pieces of intersecting legislation. The new, single-pathway compensation claims system will make accessing support quicker, and simpler. Certain payments will also be enhanced. You can learn all about the changes on the DVA web site.

From 1 July, we're also standing up the new Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, which will provide a more

connected system of support for ADF personnel, veterans and families of veterans. The new agency, supported by \$78 million from the Government, will focus on supporting positive transitions so veterans can connect and contribute to the community and thrive post service. Importantly, the agency will have a remit for complex case management, encompassing service coordination and referral to services for at-risk veterans and families of veterans to make sure no one falls through the gaps. The Agency will connect veterans and families to service and support nationwide, working closely with the Veterans' and Families' Hub network to provide access to services close to home.

We are also investing \$739 million into improving medical treatment and rehabilitation for veterans. DVA is now working more closely with Defence to identify medical risks earlier and act sooner. Modern clinical evidence shows early access to the right care at the right time can have a hugely positive impact on outcomes and overall wellbeing, reducing long term impairment and chronic illness while improving daily functioning and mental health.

Finally, I congratulate the Guild on your upcoming 80th anniversary. It's a testament to the vital work that you have done for so long in supporting our war widows and now also evolving into supporting a broader cohort of veteran families as well in the 21st Century. Australia is blessed to have an expansive ecosystem of organisations providing support to our veterans and families, of which the Guild has been a pivotal part. Thank you for everything you do – the services, support and advocacy you provide is remarkable and has made a positive impact on the lives of so many.

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



Minister Harris at the NSW Anzac Day Dawn Service. Photo by NSW Government.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on behalf of the NSW Government.

I would first like to acknowledge the upcoming 80th anniversary of Australian War Widows NSW. This is a remarkable milestone, reflecting eight decades of unwavering commitment and service. For over 80 years, your organisation has supported thousands of war widows and veterans' families, providing advocacy, community, and care. This enduring legacy stands as a powerful testament to compassion, resilience, and the lasting impact of your work.

The last couple of months have been busy. On 15 April, I joined the Hon. Matt Keogh MP, Federal Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and representatives from RSL LifeCare, RSL NSW and Landcom to announce Bardia Barracks as the site for a new Veteran and Family Hub for Sydney's southwest.

Operated by RSL LifeCare in partnership with RSL NSW, the Bardia Barracks Veteran and Family Hub will provide integrated and coordinated services for veterans and their families living throughout the region, operating in partnership with the Hawkesbury Veteran and Family Hub. Expected to open in mid-2026, more information is available here: www.veterans.nsw.gov.au/support/bardia-barracks-veteran-and-family-hub/

I was saddened to miss this year's Anzac Field of Remembrance service at St Andrew's Cathedral on 23 April due to a prior engagement. I heard that the service was deeply moving, and nice that many of you could come together to honour the personal sacrifices and lasting contributions made by war widows. I had the honour of attending the NSW Anzac Day Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, which saw over 11,000 people commemorate at dawn.

The NSW Government recently released the 2025 Veterans Strategy Report Card, highlighting the progress and key achievements against the Strategy actions delivered from 1 January to 31 December 2025. Following this progress snapshot, a comprehensive two-year report on all actions and outcomes to be published in early 2027. You can read the Report Card here: www.veterans.nsw.gov.au/about-us/nsw-veterans-strategy/

Earlier this month, the Anzac Memorial opened a new exhibition Lustre, which showcases artwork inspired by Lustre Force, combined Australian, New Zealand and British army units deployed to protect Greece from Nazi attack in 1941.

Last year, artists from Australia and New Zealand retraced the footsteps of Lustre Force, walking the battlefields and visiting cemeteries where the men and women of Lustre Force and their German foe lie. The exhibition showcases the impressions they made of the impact of that journey. Lustre is open until mid-July and I encourage you to visit if you are in Sydney. More information is available at: www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au/event/lustre

Yours sincerely,

THE HON DAVID HARRIS MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
Minister for Gaming and Racing
Minister for Veterans
Minister for Medical Research
Minister for the Central Coast

Membership *update*

Thank you to the hundreds of you who have embraced our new membership model. Our new membership model is about three things: providing choice to current members, recognising the contributions of WWII widows and our volunteers; and ensuring we know who we are servicing.

We have almost completed the first stage of implementation, renewing the membership and applying the model to almost 300 of you. It has been pleasing to see more than 70 WWII widows and volunteers avail themselves of the free **Guild Membership** option.

The next phase of implementation involves the application of the **Community Membership** option to the broader member base and

inviting new community members to join us through our social work and wellbeing services.

Below is the membership comparison table for your reference, demonstrating the key differences between the Guild and Community Membership options. While the table notes that *The Guild Digest* will be distributed in hard copy to Guild Members only, as we are still in the implementation phase – we are providing this edition to all members at this time. Going forward, it will only be provided in hard copy to Guild Members.

Community Membership provides a simple way to become involved with the organisation. From 2027 onwards, all people accessing our programs and services will be

required to be at least a Community Member. This helps us ensure that everyone we support is a war widow or a family member of a veteran.

Community Members are classed as 'non-financial' members while Guild Members are classed as 'financial members', and receive access to additional benefits including participation in governance processes.

Life Members are classed as Guild Members and there is no change to their entitlements, support or services from us.

If you have not yet renewed your membership and would like to, please give us a call on **02 9267 6577** or email membership@fov.org.au.

Member Benefit	Community Member	Guild Member
Cost	\$0	\$30 - 1 year / \$85 - 3 years
War Widows Social Clubs	✓	✓
War Widows Friendship Line	✓	✓
Social Work Service	✓	✓
Rise Together Initiative	✓	✓
Webinars	✓	✓
Online Resource Hub	✓	✓
Monthly newsletters	✓	✓
Wellbeing activities (in person)	✓	✓
Wellbeing activities (online)	Limited	✓
War widows transport assistance		✓
Digital Literacy Program		✓
Quarterly journal		✓
Free access to organisation luncheons		✓
Eligible for Life Membership		✓
AGM invitations and votes		✓
Can nominate Board Directors		✓
Eligible for consideration as organisational representative		✓
Participation in governance and strategic direction of organisation		✓

Advocacy Update

Council rate concession equality

Our campaign to restore concession equality to war widows on council rates in NSW is gaining momentum. Since December 2025 we have engaged with 90 Councils and State Government representatives.

Our second round of engagement has now commenced. This round of engagement provides costings of the proposal, allowing Councils and the State Government to understand the impacts of our request.

Currently, section 134 of the Local Government Regulation limits eligibility for full local government rate concessions to war widows/widowers who would qualify for a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC). In practice, this income and assets test means some war widows in NSW lose a concession they previously received as a household once their veteran spouse dies. We want to see this removed from the Regulation so that the concession is available to all DVA recognised war widows/widowers.

We have identified that there are 3,227 recognised war widows across the state who are currently ineligible for the council rate concession, while more than 6,000 war widows across the state receive the concession.

Costs of expanding eligibility

Funding of rate concessions in NSW is shared between State and Local Government, with the State Government contributing 55% of the required funding and Local Government contributing 45%.

The total cost to the NSW State Government of implementing the change to s134 is up to \$754,311, with the remaining \$616,500 to be

shared among 128 local councils in NSW. The total cost of the change we are seeking is estimated at \$1.37 million per year.

While some war widows become ineligible for the concession because they inherit their partner's assets, many do not. In an environment where the cost of living is ever increasing, the concession conferred by s134 of the Regulation offers a significant and material difference in the lives of more than 3,000 war widows across NSW.

Responses to date

After bringing this issue to the attention of Councils and Mayors around the state, not only have we gained the support of many, but some have gone further. Ryde Council has chosen to implement the concession for all war widows in their area. Additionally, the Hills Shire Council has advised that they provide an additional rebate available to war widows in their area on their rates. For more information on both please contact Ryde Council on **02 9952 8222** or at **cityofryde@ryde.nsw.gov.au** and the Hills Shire Council on **02 9843 0555** or at **council@thehills.nsw.gov.au**.

Additionally, Mayors of Hawksbury and Yass have passed formal resolutions supporting this change. We've also had multiple Mayors and State Members write to the Minister for Local Government in support of this change, including the Minister for Veterans, The Hon David Harris MP.

The Minister for Local Government, The Hon Ron Hoenig MP has responded to the Guild, some of our members, and Councils, noting a review of the Local Government Regulation is currently underway and our proposal is being considered as part of that process.

Further, State Shadow Minister for Veterans and Local Government, Tim James MP, is supportive of our proposal and we are grateful for the additional attention he and his office are helping us bring to this issue.

While we are not quite there yet, momentum is building and we continue to advocate for change. You can continue to support this campaign by sending letters of support for this change to the Office for Local Government at **olg@olg.nsw.gov.au** or continue speaking with your State Member.

Entitlements *Update*

DVA pensions and allowances

From 20 March, pensions and allowances received by some veterans and their families increased with the first full payment made to veterans and their widows on 16 April 2026.

The War Widow(er)'s Pension has increased \$22.60 per fortnight to \$1,223.40 and the Income Support Supplement has increased \$6.80 per fortnight to \$363.80. Wholly Dependent Partner payments under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (MRCA) have also increased \$22.60 per fortnight to \$1,223.40.

These payments include the Energy Supplement paid to DVA pensioners. For more information on other pension rates please visit www.dva.gov.au.

Advocacy regulation

DVA has released a public consultation paper regarding regulating compensation advocacy services, following an ongoing rise in commercial advocates engaging in behaviours and practices that prioritise profit over the health and wellbeing of veterans and widowed partners.

While we do not provide claims advocacy, we are highly invested in these reforms as they impact the experiences and wellbeing of widowed partners trying to access the compensation system and families of veterans who are engaging with it for the first time.

DVA is proposing to:

- restrict exploitative fee practices;
- ban offshore hosting of veteran data;
- prevent misleading or deceptive conduct;
- ensure fee-charging advocates are properly trained, insured and ethical; and

- avoid over-regulation of ESOs and volunteers.

We are supportive of reforms that strengthen regulation of the veterans' advocacy sector, particularly where such reform improves protections for widowed partners and veteran families navigating the compensation system.

We are concerned that current and emerging commercial advocacy practices disproportionately expose widowed partners to harm. At the time claims are lodged, widowed partners may be:

- newly responsible for complex legal and administrative processes;
- managing mental health impacts, caring responsibilities, or income loss; and
- highly reliant on advice presented as expert, urgent or essential.

In this context, commission-based fees, contingency fees, opaque contracts and excessive termination penalties pose significant risks. These practices can materially reduce compensation intended to provide long term financial security for families after service related death, and may pressure widowed partners into agreements they do not fully understand or feel able to challenge.

The proposed reform provides an important opportunity to signal that the compensation system exists not merely to process claims, but to uphold dignity, fairness and protection for those who bear the enduring cost of service. Widowed partners and vulnerable veteran families should never be placed in a position where grief, urgency or lack of system knowledge leaves them exposed to exploitation.

Booked car with driver updates

Many of our widowed partner Gold Cards holders use DVA's Book Car with Driver transport service. Now DVA has introduced another way to access this service by using their My Service Portal. Through the My Service Portal you can now ask DVA to arrange transport for treatment covered by your Gold Card.

DVA has also changed how you arrange transport back home following your medical appointment. When you have finished the medical appointment, you don't have to ring DVA to book your return back home: you can do this by ringing the transport provider. According to DVA, drivers should be giving a right of return card on the journey to the appointment, which has all the information you need to organise your journey back home. When making your return booking, use your right of return card, and quote your DVA number, and a driver will be back to pick you up from the appointment. If the driver has not offered a card, please ask for one.

We know that the Booked Car with Driver Service from DVA often causes a lot of angst and anxiety for many widowed partners. If you run into any trouble, please do not hesitate to give us a call, and one of our social workers will help you out, or call DVA directly on **1800 550 455**.

New Veterans' Legislation

*The new Veterans' Legislation will come into effect from 1 July 2026. There are **no changes to existing compensation payments or services. Veterans and widowed partners do not need to take any action for their payments and services provided by DVA to continue.***

*The improved Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (MRCA) will recognise medical conditions which were previously accepted under the Defence Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (DRCA) and the Veteran Entitlement Act (VEA). **There is no need for any veteran or widowed partner already in the system to re-establish any form of liability for accepted conditions or service-related deaths.***

New provisions make it easier for widows

The new Act includes additions which we class as an absolute advocacy win for many in our community. From 1 July 2026, the definition of a service injury will change, removing the requirement to show that a medical event that occurs on duty, such as a heart attack or stroke, was a result of the member's service. Making the claim pathway for such deaths simpler.

Secondly, from 1 July 2026, serving members will be covered for the impacts of any unintended consequences of medical treatment provided while a member is in the ADF. This includes pre-existing conditions or preventative treatment where injuries or deaths arise from that treatment. This means that where a death of injury occurs as a result of medical

treatment provided by Defence, the claims pathway is again simplified.

Both changes are significant wins for the many widow partners who have experienced difficulties in establishing liability for deaths that have arisen because of a medical event on duty, or deaths that result from medical treatment.

These were the very issues that we raised throughout the veterans' legislation consultation and are very pleased to see them now included in the enhanced MRCA going forward.

Enhancements to existing support

From 1 July 2026, several additional changes made to the MRCA will have a positive impact on widowed

partners and veteran families. These include:

- Additional compensation payments available for the children of severely injured veterans.
- Posthumous permanent impairment payments will be made available to widowed partners where claims were outstanding at the time of a veteran's death.
- The Repatriation Commission will be able to direct particularly vulnerable veterans to receive financial advice before receiving a lump sum permanent impairment payment.
- All Gold Card holders will be eligible to claim a travel reimbursement amount of \$0.68/km when a private vehicle is used for travel to approved treatment, which is an increase of \$0.24/km from the VEA entitlement. Additionally, 50km round trip minimum distance requirements will also be removed ensuring that more veterans and their families can be reimbursed for travel costs relating to their service-related conditions.
- VEA veterans having difficulties managing their domestic and personal care tasks due to service-related conditions will become eligible to apply for Household Services and Attendant Care for the first time.
- Children of severely injured DRCA veterans will become eligible for the Education and Training Scheme.
- Veteran funeral expenses for all service-related deaths occurring on or after 1 of July 2026 will be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$14,990.
- Partners of veterans who meet the requirements of a Wholly Dependent Partner under the MRCA will be entitled to compensation and a Gold Card.
- There will also be additional flexibility introduced allowing Wholly Dependent Partner compensation payments to be turned into an age based lump-sum for claims made after 1 July 2026.

We appreciate this is all very technical and there are a number of changes that are coming online from 1 July.

We are pleased to see the movement and the greater support provided to the widowed partners and the veterans and their families already in the compensation system, however as many know we

are keen to see a lot more veteran families included in the compensation system and will continue to advocate in that regard. We also continue to advocate for terminology change — Wholly Dependant Partner remains a terribly offensive choice of words to refer to widowed partners, many of whom are women.

As the new Act comes into effect it's really important that we keep the information flowing between DVA and our community, and are looking forward to hosting a series of webinars to help you all get across the information and the additional support that is coming online.

While there is a lot of change coming into effect soon, a reminder: there are no changes to existing compensation payments or services, and you do not need to take any action to continue to receive payments and services from DVA.

As always, we are here to help, please give us call. You can also contact DVA directly to discuss your circumstances; they can be contacted on **1800 383 372** or you can email them at **generalenquiries@dva.gov.au**.

Highlights — what widowed partners need to know from 1 July 2026:

- ★ Your existing payments and services are not changing
- ★ Deaths from on-duty medical events are now automatically recognised as service-related and deaths resulting from defence medical treatment are now covered
- ★ Veteran funeral expenses for all service-related deaths reimbursed up to \$14,990
- ★ Travel reimbursement increased to \$0.68/km
- ★ Children of severely injured DRCA veterans will become eligible for the Education and Training Scheme

Honouring service & sacrifice: *widows & families at the centre of remembrance*

On the morning of 23 April, we gathered once again to do what war widows and veteran families have done for 74 years: remember their loved one, their own way.

The 74th annual ANZAC Field of Remembrance was held at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, where 140 guests came together in person ahead of ANZAC Day. Many more joined us through the live stream, with members gathering in Coffs Harbour, Albury, Laurieton, and Yass, while others watched from homes across the country. No matter where we were, we were united in the same act of remembrance.

To step inside the Cathedral that morning was to step into a place quieter than the world outside — a solemn space warmed by the company of women who understand one another without needing words. As members described it, the morning feels "almost out of this world," or "spectacular, uplifting." For the women who attend every year — some travelling great distances — this is the most important day of the year.



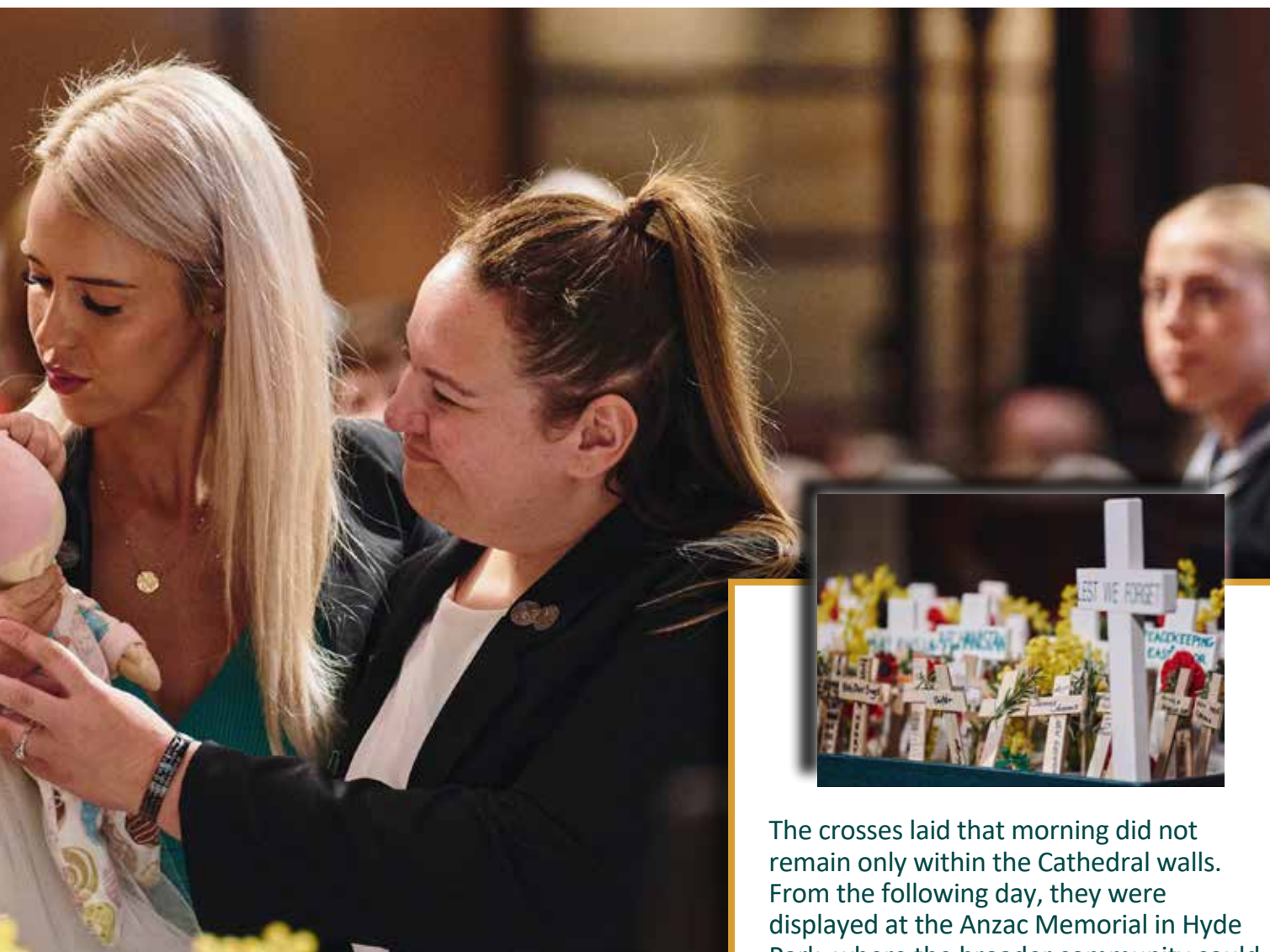
The service was led by Master of Ceremonies Sarah Loft, who understands loss and sacrifice intimately following the loss of her partner Corporal Alexander Naggs, in 2023—an understanding that bound her to the women sitting in the pews. The service delivered its familiar proceedings, until the moment awaited by all, and the heart of this unique service: the laying of tributes in remembrance of loved ones.

The laying of the crosses is the moment the morning turned. After official crosses were laid by dignitaries, the service focus turned to the women who created it. War widows stepped forward, each laying a tribute for each conflict Australia was involved in, from the First World War to Afghanistan. Beside each woman stood a child, a grandchild or a great-grandchild of a veteran, carrying a sprig of wattle to place alongside the cross. Watching generations of widows and families laying tributes side by side is a bittersweet reminder that service and

sacrifice is carried across generations, and a hope that our veterans' sacrifices will never be forgotten.

Following them, every war widow in attendance stepped forward and laid their own tribute. By the time they reached the Field, their crosses were inscribed with names of veterans and personal messages, drawings, rosemary, or flowers — a whole life carried onto the crosses that were held on tightly, kissed and laid with a mix of pride and sadness.

At that moment, the Cathedral falls still. An indescribable emotion fills the room and holds everyone in. As war widows lay their tribute, the space swells with love, grief, sadness and a pride that belongs only to our war widows. It is a moment that allows them to grieve and to honour in their own way, alongside others who need no explanation. When speaking of the service, our war widows reach for words to describe it. "I don't know exactly what it is," Mary Palframan says. "It's remembrance."



The Field grew further still as families and members of the congregation were invited forward to lay their own tribute in remembrance of a veteran they love. Formality resumed and the service closed with a deeply moving reading of the poem *The Silent Ranks*, delivered by Sue Doolin and her grandson, Angus — a tribute to all those who stand beside and behind our veterans, in service and in loss.

Reflecting on the day, members described what it means to them. Jenny Ware shared, "it means everything to me... I get teary honouring not just our men, but ourselves for what we do." Looking across the Field of crosses, Lynne Boyd reflects: "they're still in our hearts no matter what." When asked what makes this service unique, Jackie Clarke said, "it is more intimate, especially for war widows."

This year, as our organisation marks 80 years, the ANZAC Field of Remembrance stands as a testament to what we have always known: that remembrance is not a single day. For war widows who miss their veteran, they remember every day.



The crosses laid that morning did not remain only within the Cathedral walls. From the following day, they were displayed at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, where the broader community could see the Field, the tributes, and the names of those who may not have made it to an honour roll — and where war widows' and families' loss, grief and sacrifice were in view, for all to acknowledge and understand a little deeper, during ANZAC Day and beyond.

To make the service as accessible to all in our community, regardless of location and availability, once again the ANZAC Field of Remembrance was recorded. If you would like to watch the service, please scan the QR code below.

Watch the
service



74TH ANZAC FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE





74TH ANZAC FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE





74TH ANZAC FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE







War widows from the Albury area gathering to watch the Sydney ANZAC Field of Remembrance service live.



Personalised crosses laid by members in the Field.

ANZAC Field of Remembrance

Regional gatherings

Each year, we do our best to bring the ANZAC Field of Remembrance to regional areas. It is important to us that widows who are not located in Sydney or who cannot travel to attend the service have a way to be involved, no matter where they live.

This is why we host the regional gatherings around NSW to watch a livestream of the service, and allow war widows to come together, lay crosses, and share the experience with the people who understand their loss and their feeling around ANZAC Day.

This year, we hosted regional livestream gatherings in Coffs Harbour, Yass, Albury and Laurieton, with war widows' feedback highlighting how moving it was and how much it is needed for them regionally.

Laurieton

In Laurieton, the gathering was described with just one word: “*marvellous.*” 20 widows came together, sharing morning tea with personalised, painted crosses at the ready for when tributes were to be laid.

The livestream itself was a moving experience, with widows reflecting on the emotional impact of the service. “*It brings back memories,*” one widow shared.

The gathering held particular significance for the local widows, as the livestream offered a rare chance to take part in a national moment of remembrance, without the difficulty of travelling to a larger service. “*There are a lot of the older ladies, so this is great for them.*”

Yass

The Yass gathering was held at the Yass Soldiers Club, and included widows from Yass, Queanbeyan, and Goulburn.

The day began with morning tea, followed by the livestream and lunch. As the widows sat together attentively watching the service, many reflected on their own losses. During key moments of the service, including the Ode and laying of the crosses, members stood in deep reflection and in solidarity with their peers in Sydney.

The atmosphere was described as deeply moving and allowed many of the widows present to not just passively watch the service, but to actively participate.

Albury

Albury saw another “*strong turnout*,” with more than 20 widows attending the livestream gathering. “*The service was great*,” reflected a local widow who said that the livestream paired with their local participation provided a feeling of being at the service in Sydney.

Marlene Sullivan, Albury Social Club Coordinator, suggested the idea of members placing their crosses in gardens and pot plants, ensuring that their tribute could be laid somewhere they can see every day. “*I put my cross in the garden*,” she shared.

The accessibility of the livestream was widely appreciated as many widows are unable to attend the service in person. “*It’s important, so the ladies that want to come, can join in. We had so many ladies join because it suits them well and everyone can sit and relax. It should continue.*”

Coffs Harbour

The Coffs Harbour gathering brought together at the C.ex Coffs another 20 widows from Clarence Valley and Coffs Harbour, as well as local Legacy representatives.

Widows described the experience as both lovely and moving, with clear visibility of the service allowing participants to feel closely connected to proceedings in Sydney. As one widow shared, “*it’s good to have this. People can’t go to Sydney, it’s good to be able to watch the service with everyone.*” This gathering allowed widows from various locations to come together, which they don’t often get the opportunity to do, reinforcing the importance and significance of the livestream.

Several widows brought the crosses they received in their last *Guild Digest*, enabling them to lay their crosses in the Field miles away from Sydney. “*We were glad to be part of it*,” reflected a local widow.



Over the last five years, the livestreaming of the ANZAC Field of Remembrance has grown and is proving to be an important way for war widows to take part in remembrance, regardless of age, location, or mobility. We encourage widows to join again next year, whether in person or virtually, and social club coordinators to reach out to our team to organise a gathering in their area, as we continue this yearly tradition.

If you have not been able to see the service on the day, the recording is available to see online by scanning the QR code on this page.

Watch the
service





War widow Jenny Ware at the Lest We Forget Harbour Sunset Tribute Concert at the Sydney Opera House on ANZAC Day eve.

Representing war widows & families ANZAC Day 2026

When Mrs Jessie Vasey founded our organisation, she did so with a fierce conviction: that the women and families who had given so much to the nation deserved to be seen, heard, and recognised. Her vision laid the foundations upon which our organisation still stands today. ANZAC week is one of those moments where our representatives honour the work of our founder and the many war widows who continued advocating for recognition, by laying wreaths and tributes on behalf of war widows and the families of veterans.

This year held particular significance. With the recent expansion of our services into South Australia (SA), we were proud to ensure that war widows and families in SA were represented alongside those in NSW at ANZAC commemorations. Across numerous services and two states, our members stood proudly at cenotaphs, gardens of remembrance, school halls and memorial parks.

The commemorative activity began on Saturday 18 April at the

Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway's ANZAC Day service where State President Queen Dunbar laid a wreath. The next day, Queen also laid a wreath alongside member Sue Doolin at the Five Dock RSL ANZAC Service. A moving and well attended service, with local school children participating. Sue's family — including her son, a Timor veteran, his wife, daughter and grandchildren — stood alongside her as they do each year.

On Wednesday 22 April, Maureen

Moore represented the Guild at the RSL LifeCare ANZAC Day Commemorative Service and Veteran March at the RSL ANZAC Village in Narrabeen, where Brigadier Vincent Williams CSC (Retd.), Acting President of RSL NSW, delivered the ANZAC Address. As both a resident of the Village and a Guild member, Maureen's presence was fitting.

Friday 24 April brought two further services. At the Australian Remembrance Foundation's ANZAC Tribute at the Sydney Opera House

— broadcast live on 7Two and attended by thousands of people — Navy widow Jenny Ware represented our community. That same morning, veteran and member Pamela Goodhart-Dodd laid a wreath at the Pittwater House School ANZAC Day Service.

ANZAC Day itself, Saturday 25 April, was our largest day of representation. At the NSW ANZAC Day Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, State President Queen Dunbar laid the wreath on behalf of war widows and families of veterans, accompanied by Board Chair Tricia Hobson. Across Sydney and well beyond, our representatives stood at services as the sun rose. Michelle Carr was at Chatswood, joined by her children Mason and Monique. Adele Richards represented us at Medowie; Margaret Navas at the Liverpool War Memorial; Nola Hill at North Ryde; Dell Barrett at Woy Woy Memorial Park; and Merle Kelly, a long-standing local attendee, at Wodonga's Woodland Grove Cenotaph. Michelle Carr returned later that morning to lay a wreath at the Willoughby Family and Community Commemorative Service.

In SA, member Maria Barclay represented our community at two services on ANZAC Day — the RSL SA Dawn Service at the SA National War Memorial in Adelaide, and the RSL SA Service of Remembrance at the Cross of Sacrifice, where it has long been a custom for War Widows SA and Legacy SA to each present a tribute. Maria's presence at these significant ceremonies marked an important moment: war widows and families in SA now have a continuing representation at their state's most solemn occasions.

On ANZAC Day afternoon, war widows and families of veterans joined the ANZAC Day March in Sydney. It is always a proud moment for them to march following our veterans, on such a significant day for all.

Our final commemoration of the week took place on Tuesday 28 April, when Michelle Carr laid a wreath at the Ravenswood School for Girls ANZAC Day Commemorative Service in Gordon.

To every representative who represented our community, laying the wreath on behalf of war widows and the families of veterans, thank you. To our members across the country, thank you: we are grateful for the privilege of standing with you.



Top: Board Director Michelle Carr at the Ravenswood School for Girls ANZAC Day Commemorative Service in Gordon.

Middle: Macarthur Social Club Coordinator Kay Meredith (left) and member Judy Cole (right) at the Campbelltown RSL ANZAC Day service.

Bottom, left to right: Monique, Michelle and Mason Carr at the Chatswood ANZAC Day Dawn Service.

LEST WE FORGET



Above: Directors and members at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway ANZAC Day Service with General The Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK AC (MIL) CVO MC (RET).



Above: Board Director Michelle Carr (front third from left) at the Ravenswood School for Girls ANZAC Day Commemorative Service in Gordon.



Above from left to right: former President Meg Green AM, Katrina Jocusen, DVA and State President Queen Dunbar at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway ANZAC Day Service.



Above: Our wreath laid on behalf of war widows and families of veterans at services across NSW and beyond.



Above: War widows and veteran families marching at the ANZAC Day March in Sydney.



Above: Crowd gathered at the Lest We Forget Harbour Sunset Tribute Concert at the Sydney Opera House on ANZAC Day eve.



Above: Member and Adelaide Social Club Coordinator Maria Barclay at the RSL SA Dawn Service.



Above: Laurieton war widows at their local ANZAC Day gathering, with their Field of Remembrance displayed.



Above: Board Director Michelle Carr, her son Mason, and daughter Monique at the Willoughby Family and Community Service.



Above: Member Margaret Navas at the Liverpool ANZAC Day Dawn Service.



Above: Member Sue Doolin (in red) with her family and State President Queen Dunbar at the Five Dock RSL ANZAC Day Service.



Above: Member Nola Hill (left) and former Board Director Lynne Boyd (right) after the ANZAC Day March in Sydney.

Our first wellbeing activities *in Adelaide and Townsville*

With the recent closure of War Widows South Australia Inc, war widows in the area might have felt worried about losing the connections they had built over the years with other war widows in their community. The unique friendships and strong community that grows amongst war widows and veteran families who share similar experiences, are essential to their wellbeing. This is why we expanded our services to ensure war widows in South Australia (SA) continued to have a home.

Supported by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, we delivered our first two wellbeing activities in Adelaide, followed by one in Townsville. Each of these activities has provided an opportunity to get to know the local community and test the need for our support.



Adelaide war widows walk and veteran family dinner

We held our first wellbeing activity on 27 March with war widows gathering for a morning walk through the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, followed by lunch. The war widows walk gave those in attendance an introduction to what our social connection and wellbeing activities are all about: moments for themselves and to connect with their peers.

Surrounded by gardens, glasshouses and flowers unique to this region, widows reconnected with familiar faces and welcomed new ones into the group. For many of the women, it was the first time they had seen one another since the closure of their association. The walk offered a long-awaited chance to pick up where they had left off. *"Thank you for bringing us together again,"* one widow shared with our team.

The war widows present also shared that they had never met in such a setting before, and that it was wonderful to connect outdoors with both familiar and new faces. The oldest war widow of the group was delighted to share her wisdom and knowledge of local flora, which led to others joining in, asking questions or sharing knowledge as well. This type of engagement from widows reminds us of why the Guild exists: to carry forward the vision of our founder Jessie Vasey CBE OBE, ensuring war widows across the nation continue to feel supported, connected and valued.

Later that evening, war widows and veteran families came together for a dinner. We were pleased to bring families of current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members, including partners, war widows and mothers of veterans, together in person. The dinner gave families a chance to connect with others who share similar experiences and to meet our team for the first time.

This dinner marked an important step in extending our support to SA, offering a space for war widows and veteran families to meet and grow meaningful connections. It was also an important step for our team to meet local widows and families and better understand the support they need. Held at Pirate Life Brewing in Port Adelaide, the dinner was relaxed and the atmosphere welcoming and joyful; as one of our young attendees said, *"I can see the happiness."*

The wellbeing team also organised two additional visits to Adelaide in May, delivering another dinner and further wellbeing activities to engage the community. Those visits are being happily welcomed by local widows and families, allowing us to connect with more of them and to reach those who missed out last time, because every widow and veteran family deserves this opportunity.

Townsville guided meditation

Further north, Townsville families had a relaxed, calm

introduction to their very first wellbeing activity with guided meditation. Held at Inner Light Meditation Centre, the session offered gentle breathing exercises, meditation focused on mindfulness techniques, and peaceful music to relax.

With positive responses to our activities surrounding mindfulness in the past, we want to continue to host activities like these to create space for veteran families to slow down and take a moment for themselves.

With 11 family members in attendance, we were able to see firsthand the desire for community and connection with other defence and veteran families in the area, reminding us how important our wellbeing activities are.

In delivering this targeted support in both Adelaide and Townsville, we aimed to address unmet needs for war widows and veteran families, with the mission to strengthen the wellbeing of the broader veteran family community.



With the support of the government grants, and following attendees' positive responses to our delivered activities, our team is busy planning additional activities outside of NSW and the ACT. We listen to our members' feedback and aim to provide activities that cater to a variety of people, ages, and interests. If you are a widow or family member of a veteran, we encourage you to join us at our next free activity in person, and online. Find an activity you like by scanning the QR code on this page or visit:

www.familiesofveterans.org.au/project/defence-families-wellbeing-events/

Find an
activity **near**
you



South Australia update

What is happening now for SA war widows

A warm and special welcome to the more than 50 members of War Widows SA Inc who have joined us since the start of the year. We are so pleased to have you with us and look forward to welcoming many more of you over the coming months.

We have now completed the transition phase and have commenced operations in SA, offering support, connection, and wellbeing services to SA based war widows and veteran families.

The establishment of these services signal a new start for SA war widows. We are proud to continue the work of War Widows SA Inc and ensure that war widows remain a fundamental part of the veteran eco-system in SA.



There is a thriving community of war widows and veteran families in SA, and we are excited to bring our services and support to this region. We are grateful for the war widows in SA for trusting us with their legacy.

What this means for SA widows

Now that transition is complete, this means former War Widows SA Inc members will continue to have access to:

- Continued connection: SA war widows will keep meeting, with support from the Guild's team and local volunteers.
- Our services: all SA war widows and veteran families can join the Guild's online activities and access social work services, including wellbeing support, advocacy, and information.
- Membership: if individuals were a member of War Widows SA Inc, membership

can transition to the Guild free for the first 12 months. Life Members will retain their status.

Monthly meetings of the War Widows Social Club in SA are set to recommence from May 2026. If you are a war widow in SA and would like to connect with the social club, please call us on **02 9267 6577** or email **warwidows@fov.org.au**.

Visit our **SA web page**

Our dedicated welcome page for South Australian war widows and veteran families. It explains the transition from Australian War Widows SA Inc, the support you can access today — online activities, social work, and our resource hub — and answers to frequently asked questions about membership and entitlements.



VALE

- Anne Burton STRATHFIELD
- Barbara Garland MAWSON
- Eileen Morrow NORTH ST MARYS
- Enid Pugh STOCKTON
- Ethel Day WARABROOK
- Helene Rendall GORDON
- Jean Baird FAIRFIELD
- Joan Phoebe CURRA CREEK
- June Travis ST GEORGES BASIN
- Leatrice Bennett LANE COVE
- Margaret McCarthy VINEYARD
- Margaret Clabburn MINTO
- Maria Nugent WAMBERAL
- Marjorie Parkes WARNERS BAY
- Mavis Wilson CONCORD
- Miriam Collison JUNCTION HILL
- Muriel McCabe OAM DAVIDSON
- Nancy Connell FINGAL BAY
- Olwen Kenderdine BOWRAL
- Shirley Lambert RANDWICK

- Shirley Bennett WEST WYALONG
- Ursula Thompson BIRRONG

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of these members ❤️

Welcome to our new members!

- Anna Neave KLEMZIG
- Debra Osman SOMERTON PARK
- Elizabeth Symmons HAWKER
- Evelyn Stidworthy WAUCHOPE
- Helen Adamson TROTT PARK
- James Bowes TONSLEY
- Jillian Davidson STRATHALBYN
- Jullian Broome PARADISE
- June Swain SEAFORTH
- Lennieve Baker GLENELG SOUTH
- Lynette Cook WODONGA
- Lynette Mooney PT MACQUARIE
- Maxine Fenton GREENWITH
- Michelle Roberts SOUTH PENRITH
- Nola Price-Beck GOLDEN GROVE
- Sally Bailey QUEANBEYAN WEST
- Suzanne Martin WOODVILLE PARK
- Yvonne Seebohm ISABELLA PLAINS

Members who recently turned 100 - Happy Birthday!

- Amy Ritchie KANWAL
- Elizabeth Cremer BIRCHGROVE
- Grace Moad ORANGE
- Gwendoline Imms MYOLA
- Lillis Farrell PORT MACQUARIE
- Margaret Carrigg GOULBURN
- Marjorie Isles BERRY
- Mavis Fitzgibbon ALLAWAH
- Norma Malone MENANGLE

Right: In February, Dulcie Coles celebrated her 100th birthday. Her daughters and grandchildren were all there to celebrate.



Below: Kath Florence, member of the City Saturday Social Club, celebrated her 100th birthday with her friends and fellow war widows.



Celebrating some very special birthdays!



Above: in Western NSW, Eileen Wheeler celebrated her 102nd birthday in February.

Left: A special celebration was held in March for Marjorie Isle who celebrated this milestone with her family.

Free DVA Guide: Living Independently at Home

A free guide is available from the Department of Veterans' Affairs outlining services that can help you stay living independently at home.

It covers supports such as personal care, cleaning, home maintenance, aids and equipment, and community nursing.

Although the guide uses the term "veteran", most of these services are also available to war widows with a Gold Card.

Available online or as a free hard-copy delivered to your home.

Scan the QR code to download or call: **1800 838 372** to receive your free copy.



A DVA guide to moving into an aged care home

A free guide is provided by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, explaining the move from living at home to aged care, and the support DVA can provide along the way.

It also includes information under the new Aged Care Act (November 2025).

Although the guide uses the term "veteran", most supports also apply to war widows with a Gold Card.

Available online or as a free hard-copy delivered to your home.

Scan the QR code to download or call: **1800 838 372** to receive your free copy.



Digital Literacy: guides and videos to help you stay connected

Do you want to feel more confident using email, booking events online, or keeping in touch through Facebook?

Our Resource Hub now has simple guides and short videos designed for beginners. Each guide walks you through the basics step by step, and the videos show you exactly what to do on screen.

Topics include setting up an email account, using Eventbrite for bookings, and joining Facebook groups safely. These resources are free and created with older members in mind.

Included in this edition of *The Guild Digest* are seven printed guides for you to use or share with others in your community.

Explore the Digital Literacy page at www.familiesofveterans.org.au/digital-literacy-war-widows/ or call us on (02) 9267 6577.



What is Multi-Factor Authentication?

Multi-Factor Authentication, or MFA, is an extra layer of security for your online accounts. It means you need more than just a password to log in.

How does it work?

After entering your password, you will be asked for a second step — for example a code sent to your phone or a prompt in an app. This helps protect your account even if someone else knows your password. MFA makes it much harder for scammers or hackers to access your information.

How to use it

If you are prompted to do so when logging into your account, follow the prompts to setup MFA and select how you want to receive your MFA code (usually by text message or using an app). You can also turn on MFA in your account's security or privacy settings.

Our latest guide to empower you: support & services guide for ageing veteran families

Discover our Support and Services for Ageing Veteran Families Guide, your essential resource for understanding the range of benefits, concessions, and support available to war widows and older veteran families.

From financial assistance and healthcare to transport, aged care, and community programmes, this guide connects you with the services and networks that help you stay independent, supported, and informed at every stage.

Find it in our Resource Hub on familiesofveterans.org.au/resource-hub or scan the QR code to download the guide.



If you, or someone you know, is having a tough time and needs support, information, or guidance, please reach out to our office or one of these many phone services available.

- **1800 ELDERHelp** – 1800 353 374 (*national free call phone number that automatically redirects callers seeking information and advice on elder abuse with existing phone line service in their jurisdiction*)
- **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling** – 1800 011 046
- **All-hours Support Line** – 1800 628 036 (*Australian Department of Defence*)
- **Lifeline Australia** – 13 11 14 (*24/7 crisis support line*)
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467 (*24 hour counselling for suicide prevention and mental health support*)
- **1800RESPECT** – 1800 737 732 (*24 hour sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling service*)
- **Defence Member and Family Support Helpline** – 1800 624 608

