

\$55 MILLION PACKAGE FOR FORMER F-111 AIRCRAFT FUEL TANK MAINTENANCE WORKERS

Thousands more former F-111 fuel tank maintenance personnel will now have access to health care and compensation arrangements under a new \$55 million package. This program will expand access to health care and compensation to those who had been excluded previously. This investment comes in response to a parliamentary inquiry report into F-111 workers and their families. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, said that these investments would deliver the Rudd Government's commitment to better health care arrangements across the country.

“From tonight, more people will be eligible for care and compensation, now including those who carried out F-111 fuel tank maintenance involving fuel tank entry. This change will help 2,400 extra personnel, including the ‘pick and patch’ workers, at a cost of \$39.6 million,” Mr. Griffin said.

Over 3,000 more personnel will be covered for any of the 31 conditions identified by the Study of Health Outcomes in Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP) as linked to maintenance work inside an F-111 fuel tank. The government is also reopening the SHOAMP health care scheme, which closed on 20 September 2005, at a cost of \$12.5 million. This scheme will support the health care needs of affected personnel while their claims are being determined. “The government will provide a flexible, extended program of counseling – for groups or individuals – to meet the clinical needs of personnel and their families at a cost of \$1 million.”

Other announcements include:

- Ex gratia payments will be available to the estates of those who died prior to 8 September 2001
- Statutory declarations can now be used as evidence where no contrary information exists.
- The Department will review all previous claims where a statutory declaration was rejected.

- A specialized implementation team in the Department of Veterans' Affairs will implement the changes, overseen by a senior person responsible for reporting to government.

A new F-111 fuel tank maintenance website, operational from tonight, will provide complete access to all F-111 fuel tank maintenance related information. The website can be accessed at:

<http://f111.dva.gov.au>.

“Under the former flawed scheme, ex gratia payments were provided based on arbitrary classifications without any reference to their health needs. This new and vastly improved package addresses people’s actual health problems in a fair and equitable way. Our response returns to the fundamental principle that defence personnel should receive compensation and health care for any ill-effects which can be linked to their military service,”

Mr Griffin said.

F-111 inquiry line for affected personnel and their families: 1800 555 323

For DVA inquiries please call 133 254

Media inquiries only: Sasha Nimmo 0437 863 109

The VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counseling Service can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 1800 011 046.

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