



EMBARGO: AGAINST DELIVERY
1:40 pm
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY, 25 JULY, 1980

LAUNCHING OF THE SYDNEY LEGACY TORCH APPEAL

Thank you for inviting me here today to open your Torch Appeal launching the Sydney Legacy Appeal for 1980. I had the privilege of launching your 1976 appeal.

The intervening years have seen a continued commitment, here and throughout Australia, to the spirit of service which is central to the Legacy charter.

We can never fully repay the debt we owe, as a nation, to those who served their country in time of war.

The freedom we enjoy today, and the standard of living that we are inclined to take for granted, should be constant reminders to us of the extent of our indebtedness.

But it has been said that no nation in the world cares for the families of its returned ex-servicemen with as much generosity and dedication as Australia.

The Legacy organisation and the Commonwealth Government share together a profound interest in caring for the dependents of those who have been casualties in the service of our country.

The creation of the Commonwealth repatriation system in 1917 was recognition of a national responsibility for ex-servicemen and women, and their families.

Successive governments have built significantly upon that first step. But no amount of money or government involvement can provide the personal touch of a voluntary organisation such as Legacy.

The hallmark of Legacy's work has always been the personal service given to families by Legatees.

Sydney Legacy provides over a thousand ex-servicemen as Legatees in metropolitan Sydney and country areas.

This is the result of a comradeship fostered and developed in battle, which has continued for over fifty years.

It is alive in the magnificent spirit of continuing care for the families of departed comrades; and this care characterises the unselfish efforts of Australia's returned servicemen.

Legacy's contribution in what many sometimes see as an uncaring and selfish society is an example to us all.

Of course, it is impossible to replace a lost husband. But what is admirable is the way in which Legatees are willing to ease the burden of those left alone to cope with the pressures of caring for a family.

This requires from each Legatee time, energy, money and experience. And he provides for the family in his care, practical assistance in obtaining Government services such as social welfare and repatriation benefits.

The contribution made by Legacy to the education of children of deceased veterans deserves universal acknowledgement.

I suspect that when Major General Sir John Gellibrand formed a remembrance club after World War I, he never imagined that it would blossom into such a comprehensive community service organisation.

Since then, it has taken care of over half a million widows and children.

There are 108,000 people in Australia currently being cared for by Legacy; and 27,000 of these are the direct responsibility of Sydney Legacy.

And this number is growing. For over the years, all too many tragic conflicts in Malaysia, Korea, and Vietnam have brought new responsibilities to Legacy.

These have been met; and families within their care have included those of allied ex-servicemen who have since settled in Australia; and the families of ex-servicemen who have died since returning from service.

The enormous task of assisting such families will continue into the 21st Century.

For some 50,000 Australian servicemen took part in the Vietnam War, and, in due course, many of their families will come under Legacy's care.

As a Government, we believe that care for those in need in our community is most beneficially met by government working in partnership with voluntary organisations.

In recognition of this, since coming to office, this government has maintained a long established system of providing benefits for veterans.

I believe that Australia's current repatriation system is one of the most accessible and generous systems in the world, being based on principles and policies which have been developed and tuned, over the years, to meet the needs that have arisen since World War I.

This government will continue to ensure that these principles and policies are maintained.

Repatriation expenditure increased from \$62 million in 1949/50 to \$317 million twenty years later.

In the last financial year, the figure had risen to over \$1,300 million.

And in the last Budget, the Government made substantial adjustments to a number of important benefits for veterans. These benefits are reinforced in their effectiveness by the work of Legacy.

But like all voluntary organisations, Legacy must rely primarily on fund raising activities to finance its various programmes.

Thus, it is dependent on the community in general, and in particular on people such as yourselves - the representatives of business houses and clubs - for its success.

This year, Sydney Legacy needs more than \$1.2 million to meet its programmes.

The Torch Appeal which we launch today is Legacy's major fund raising activity.

It will culminate in Legacy week with the annual button day on September 5.

This is a day when Australians are proud to show that they care by displaying Legacy's symbol and buying a button from thousands of generous helpers.

The target for the Torch Appeal this year is \$500,000.

It is obvious, ladies and gentlemen, that Sydney Legacy cannot carry on its magnificent work without strong and continued support.

Let us today assure legacy of that support.

I know all Australians are aware of the important role they can play, through this appeal, to enable Legacy to assist the families of those who served our country in time of war.

So, on behalf of those ex-servicemen who are no longer with us, I ask you all, and the whole Australian community, to give generously in the weeks ahead.

Through this spirit of giving we can make sure that the families of deceased ex-servicemen are cared for in the way they deserve and in the way the servicemen would have wished.

I have much pleasure in declaring Legacy's Torch Appeal officially open.

---000---