



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

OPENING OF NEW RADIOLOGY DEPARTMENT AND REFURBISHED WARD
AT REPATRIATION GENERAL HOSPITAL - HEIDELBERG, VICTORIA
29 AUGUST 1985

Senator Gietzelt, (representative of the Victorian Government), representatives of ex-service organisations, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me considerable pleasure to be here today on the occasion of the official opening of two much needed improvements to the range of facilities available at the Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg.

This occasion is a special "double" for it is the second time this month that I have been able to perform such a function at a Repatriation General Hospital. At the beginning of this month, I opened the new surgical operating suites at Daw Park, South Australia. Today it is the new radiological Department and the refurbished Ward 8 here at Heidelberg.

It is no coincidence that these two events have occurred so close together in time. Since it came to office in March 1983, the Australian Labor Government has given a very high priority to refurbishment and construction work throughout the Repatriation General Hospital network in Australia.

Since 1982/83 spending on Repatriation hospitals has increased by almost \$76 million (or 35 per cent). The recent Budget increased spending on these hospitals by \$19.8 million including a 78.6 per cent increase in spending on specialised equipment such as the digital subtraction unit.

Also approved for Heidelberg in the Budget brought down last week were:

- . \$3.5 million for a new outpatients department;
- . \$2.0 million for a psychogeriatric unit;
- . \$7.1 million for a new building to replace six original pavilion wards;
- . more than \$500,000 for other works.

This burst of activity in the Repatriation General Hospital system was occasioned by the need to do something, and do it urgently, to overcome the years of neglect which had left staffing levels inadequate, morale low, and a poor standard of equipment and facilities.

Among early action taken by the Minister for Veterans Affairs was his commissioning of a review of the Repatriation Hospital system by a committee led by Doctor Ian Brand. That committee's report has now been received and its wide-ranging recommendations warrant, and will receive, careful consideration by the Minister and the Government.

They will be addressed against the background of the commitment I gave in the national policy speech before last year's election "to continue upgrading repatriation hospitals to meet the needs of an ageing veterans community." That was a firm, unequivocal pledge and one which, as the 1985 Budget clearly shows, we are intent on implementing.

One of the key issues to be addressed, of course, is the Brand Review's comments on the inevitability of the integration of the Repatriation General Hospital system with the State health systems to ensure that the very best care is available to what is an ageing Veteran community. Clearly what is needed is careful planning for this eventuality. What must be uppermost in our minds, especially with an ageing veteran population, is that every effort be made to provide services, including hospital services, closer to home.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that said, I can assure you that there will continue to be Repatriation Hospitals operating as an important and visible element in the overall treatment system for Veterans and war widows for many years to come.

I know that many of you have a keen interest in the

Veterans' Entitlements Bill which will be presented to the Parliament next month. There has been a great deal of work on the Bill since it was first tabled for discussion. Comments and suggestions from the ex-service community have been considered and where appropriate incorporated in redrafting.

There can be no suggestion that there has not been consultation or co-operation. In the history of the Repatriation system there has never been such consultation on legislative changes. In this regard, I should particularly like to pay tribute to the constructive, very helpful role played by the RSL's National President Sir William Keys.

Ladies and gentlemen, on this important day in the history of this Repatriation General Hospital, I could not conclude without expressing my thanks to all concerned at Heidelberg for their work in providing care to our Veteran community; particularly the visiting Medical officers, the Visiting Medical Specialists and the staff - doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, ward staff, orderlies and domestic services staff and clinical teams.

You are responsible for running a major hospital which handles 15,000 inpatients and about 180,000 outpatients a year. While your prime responsibility is Victoria's Veteran community, you also have a much wider community role, witnessed by the wide-ranging nature of the gathering here today.

The work you do is important and is appreciated not only by your patients, but also by the community at large. I should expect that the facilities I shall now proceed to open will make your task easier and more satisfying. They certainly add a further dimension to the services provided by this important hospital.
