

Agent Orange Birth Defects

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The National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA), Mr John Methven, has given his qualified approval to the announcement by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Bruce Scott of a review of the link between Agent Orange and child birth defects.

"The VVAA was founded on the concerns of Vietnam veterans for the health of their children and themselves," he said. "We are delighted that this issue is finally on the table. At the VVAA National Congress in May 1995, I flagged this as the single most important issue facing Vietnam veterans today, and established a committee to pursue it aggressively".

The VVAA sees this belated action as a very small first step of the many required to address the problems faced by the children of veterans. Mr Methven said that the Association believed that there were four desired outcomes:

- acknowledgment of responsibility;
- a full birth defects study for the children of veterans;
- provision of appropriate medical treatment through Department of Veterans Affairs; and
- compensation for loss of life-style

The study announced by the Minister deals only with the issues of Spina Bifida and Peripheral Transient Neuropathy, but the VVAA believes that a detailed study will find a far greater range of problems associated with congenital exposure to toxins. These problems will include cancers, dysfunction of liver, kidneys and other organs, physical malformation and neuro-toxic disorders.

"Very little can be done to correct these problems, but it will go a little way towards establishing a better life-style for those who suffer from problems." Mr Methven stated. "Most of the children of Vietnam veterans are now adults in their own right, having their own families. Studies in Vietnam have shown that these problems are now appearing in the third generation. We are acting to ensure that the Australian studies are as wide-ranging as necessary to ensure that complete coverage is given to dependants."

Vietnam veterans whose children suffer from the problems identified for the initial review are urged to contact their local branch of the VVAA urgently, or telephone (03) 5721 9078.

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