



Ms Kav Selvakumar
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11
222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Selvakumar

**RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MATTER OF THE FINDINGS INTO THE DEATH OF
AUDREY J SVIKERS – (CASE REFERENCE: COR2009 002158)**

I refer to your letter dated 20 November 2012 seeking a response from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) concerning the Coroner's recommendations arising from the investigation into the Death without Inquest of Mrs Audrey J Svikers. The Department's response, as outlined below, relates to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

That during initial needs assessment, community care providers advise community care clients that it is mandatory for all homes in Victoria to have a working smoke alarm.

Recommendation 2:

In homes where community care is to be provided and there is no smoke alarm, the installation of a small alarm is organised in line with service provision. In homes where smoke alarms are installed, these are checked by the community care provider to ensure they are in working order.

Recommendation 3:

That community care providers promote regular testing and maintaining of smoke alarms to the client, their family and/or friends or provide assistance for their clients to test and maintain smoke alarms if required.

Recommendation 4:

In homes where the client smokes, community care providers promote the use of high-sided ashtrays or sealed containers to allow for properly discarded smoking materials.

DVA has carefully considered the recommendations the Coroner made regarding the above matter.

As the Court may be aware, DVA operates community services programs which provide outreach support services to the elderly and frail in Victoria. These programs include the Veterans' Home Care and the Rehabilitation Appliances Program. The purpose of Veterans' Home Care is to provide low level in-home care services to eligible veterans and war widows and widowers who wish to continue living at home, but who need a small amount of practical help.

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The Rehabilitation Appliances Program provides aids and appliances that assist entitled persons to be as self-reliant as possible in their own homes. The program aims to restore or maintain functional independence and to minimise the impact of disabilities. Aids may include mobility products, continence products and smoke alarms for the hearing impaired.

However, with respect to the Rehabilitation Appliances Program, DVA has developed procurement arrangements for the provision of smoke alarms for entitled persons with a clinical need (such as a hearing impairment). DVA is also working to improve this service by requiring contractors who provide services for this program to undertake regular maintenance, including the provision of replacement batteries, for smoke alarms.

Comments specifically regarding Recommendation 2

The most effective manner to implement the Coroner's recommendations would be through the introduction of state legislation for the community care industry along with the introduction of appropriate community care education training. In addition, the coroner's recommendations could be better effected through the introduction of a free installation and servicing based smoke alarm scheme for the elderly and frail who reside in Victoria to ensure a standard and consistent approach across the state. Similar schemes operate in other Australian states.

Additional comments

DVA supports the intent of the Coroner's recommendations and is committed to ensuring its clients are aware of fire safety issues that can occur within the home. DVA will be publishing an article about fire safety in its quarterly newsletter, *VetAffairs*, which is circulated to approximately 270,000 members of the veteran community. The article will highlight the importance of having working smoke alarms in the home, as well as providing information regarding state based services, which are available to clients to assist them in reducing fire hazards within their home. DVA is confident that this article will assist our clients.

We note the Department of Health and Ageing's response to the Coroner on the same matter. DVA's Veterans' Home Care providers will receive the alert issued by the Department of Health and Ageing reminding them of their responsibilities under the Community Care Common Standards as set out in the *Aged Care Act 1997* (the Act). The Standards provide a framework to ensure community aged care providers meet their requirements under the Act and continue to look for ways to improve their policies and practices.


DVA also notes that it is considering recommendations made by the Coroner following the inquest in the death of Mrs Pearl Recht who also passed away as a result of a house fire.

I trust that this information is of assistance to you. Should you wish to discuss this matter further please contact Dr Christine McPaul, Assistant Secretary, Community, Aged Care and Transport Branch on 02 6225 4644.

Yours sincerely



Ian Campbell
Secretary

 February 2013