



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Minister for Defence Personnel

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC

MEDIA RELEASE

5 February 2019

FIRST WORLD WAR VETERANS NOT FORGOTTEN

A number of unmarked graves of First World War veterans who died after returning from the war will be commemorated under a two-year pilot program announced today by the Federal Government.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester made the announcement saying the *Unmarked Graves of the First World War Program* will provide funding to help ex-service organisations, community groups and individuals properly acknowledge veterans' service at their place of rest.

"Australians owe all First World War veterans an enormous debt of gratitude and acknowledging their final resting place with a marker recognising their service is a demonstration of that respect," Mr Chester said.

"While the number of unmarked graves of First World War veterans is unknown, there are many individuals and special interest groups who are passionately committed to ensuring they are identified and commemorated.

"This program is an important step in ensuring every veteran who died after the First World War Armistice is remembered for their service and I would like to encourage communities right across Australia who are aware of unmarked graves to consider making an application."

An estimated 331,800 personnel deployed during the First World War, of which over 60,000 were killed or are listed as missing in action. This leaves approximately 271,800 service men and women who returned to Australia at the cessation of hostilities, of which approximately 137,000 were wounded.

"Sadly some of those who returned from the Great War ended up estranged from their families and may have struggled with day-to-day living," Mr Chester said.

"We know that many were buried in unmarked graves across the nation."

The program will be administered through the Office of Australian War Graves which has the responsibility for official commemoration of eligible veterans who died during, or as a result of war.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling provides support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Free and confidential help is available 24/7. Phone 1800 011 046 (international: +61 8 8241 4546) or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au

OAWG can be contacted via email wargraves@dva.gov.au or on 1800 555 254.

Further information can be accessed on the [Department of Veterans' Affairs website](#).

ENDS

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Whil Prendergast: 02 6277 7820

DVA Media: 02 6289 6466

Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Canberra ACT.

MP welcomes WWI headstone program

Federal Member for Mayo Rebekha Sharkie has welcomed the [announcement](#) of a \$420,000 two-year pilot program to identify and commemorate the unmarked graves of WWI veterans.



Caption: Federal Veterans' Affairs Minister Darren Chester, left, Rebekha and Goolwa RSL President Bob Plummer at the roundtable discussion held at Strathalbyn last week.

The [Unmarked Graves of the First World War Funding Assistance Program](#) will provide funding to help ex-service organisations such as the Headstone Project to identify unmarked graves across Australia and properly acknowledge the sacrifices made by these previously unknown veterans.

Rebekha has previously written to the Minister of Veterans' Affairs, Darren Chester, about this issue and has also [spoken](#) in [Parliament](#) about local efforts to recognise WWI veterans and the importance of establishing a national program to fund headstones for WWI veterans lying in unmarked graves.

Rebekha raised the issue again last week when she hosted a visit by the Minister and organised a roundtable discussion with veterans, RSL sub-branches and other community groups.

“I’m pleased that the Minister has listened to the feedback from our roundtable discussion as well as the lobbying of other organisations around Australia and has introduced this pilot program,” Rebekha said.

“It’s estimated around 12,000 WWI veterans are lying in unmarked graves in Australian cemeteries and, with the assistance of dedicated individuals who volunteer at our RSL sub-branches and community groups, these veterans will finally receive the acknowledgement that they deserve.

“The individual grants of \$450 offered under the pilot program will enable applicants to cover the most significant costs associated with unmarked graves, the brass plaque.”

While welcoming the project, Rebekha does have some concerns regarding the eligibility criteria for the pilot program.

“I am disappointed that the initial criteria do not extend to the graves of those veterans who have died within 20 years of the end of the First World War, and I hope in time the program will be extended to cover all graves,” Rebekha said.

“We don’t put a deadline on ‘Lest we forget’ on Anzac Day so why start now?”

Below: Copy of the letter sent to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Darren Chester, in March last year on this issue.



Rebekha Sharkie MP
Federal Member for Mayo



27 March 2018

The Hon Darren Chester MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Suite M1 44
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Chester,

Darren

PROPOSAL RE UNMARKED VETERANS' GRAVES

I write to raise the issue of the unmarked graves in Australian cemeteries of WW1 veterans where current Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) guidelines would not recognise their death as being attributed to their active service.

On 25 March I attended a profoundly moving headstone dedication for Mr August Nicolai, who served on the Western Front in 2018. He died by suicide twelve (12) years after returning from the war and, with no immediate family to pay for a headstone, has lain in an unmarked grave for 87 years. The funding for his headstone was raised by the community and the service had strong community support, with over 60 people braving cold and windy conditions to pay their respects to a soldier whose sacrifice for our country had not been acknowledged for close to a century.

I recognise that there is provision for the DVA to pay for headstones where the death can be directly linked to the person's active service under specific guidelines. Given that Mr Nicolai took his own life, with our more sophisticated understanding of the impact of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder arguably Mr Nicolai's death could have been attributed to his war service, but my purpose here is not to push the boundaries of the guidelines. Further, I understand that an application to DVA was not pursued in this circumstance.

I believe that a strong case can be made for the Government to provide grant funding for headstones for WW1 veterans who are currently in unmarked graves in cemeteries across Australia. In many cases these men died during the Great Depression where, if there were surviving family members, their choice was to pay for a headstone or put food on the table for the children of the veteran.

Had these men been receiving DVA pensions, the Department would pay for headstones. However, many servicemen did not apply for a DVA pension, perhaps because they would not be eligible but in many cases either because the process was too complex, they didn't know they could, they had limited literacy skills or they believed that they had to learn to cope within their own resources. Every ANZAC Day we concentrate on the message 'lest we forget' yet the service of these men in unmarked graves has been forgotten.

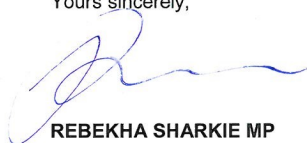
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Electorate Office: Shop 1, 72 Gawler Street (PO Box 1601) Mount Barker SA 5251
Ph: 08 8398 5566 Fax: 08 8398 5577 Email: rebekha.sharkie.mp@aph.gov.au Web: www.rebekhasharkie.com.au

As Minister, I would like you to consider the Government establishing a capped program to provide funding for headstones for WW1 veterans currently in unmarked graves. I understand that there are an estimated 12,000 of these veterans in Australian cemeteries and that the average cost of a headstone would be around \$500. If the program were to be funded over 4 years, capped at a total cost of \$6 million, it would be only \$1.5 million per annum. This would be a small investment to provide appropriate recognition for the men that were willing to sacrifice their lives for Australia.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you further.

Yours sincerely,



REBEKHA SHARKIE MP
Federal Member for Mayo

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Electorate Office: Shop 1, 72 Gawler Street (PO Box 1601) Mount Barker SA 5251
Ph: 08 8398 5566 **Fax:** 08 8398 5577 **Email:** Rebekha.Sharkie.MP@aph.gov.au

Unmarked First World War Graves

The debt of honour owed to those who gave their lives in the service of their country can never be repaid but we demonstrate our gratitude and honour the sacrifice in our cemeteries in Australia and overseas.

Funding assistance

The Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG), within DVA, has established a program whereby individuals or associations might apply for funding to assist in marking an unmarked grave.

Pilot program

A pilot program will be available for two years. The outcome of this pilot program is intended to inform if there are requirements for the program to be extended.

Whilst OAWG is not responsible for these graves, the Australian Government has made funding available to assist with their marking in the form of this funding assistance.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible to receive funding assistance the following applies:

- The current unmarked grave is located in Australia and is the grave of a First World War veteran.
- The First World War veteran served in the Australian Forces and died within 20 years of the end of the First World War.
- The applicant has the authority to alter the grave. This may be in the form of having the Right of Burial or in the absence of that, authority from the cemetery where the grave is located.
- The applicant provides a quote for the total cost of the marker.
- More information on eligibility criteria can be found in the [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#).

Note

Funding assistance is not available for maintenance or refurbishment of existing grave markers.

Applications

Applications will be processed within 90 days of receipt of application, where possible. Please note that there is a capped amount of \$450 (exclusive of GST) for each application.

You may print off and submit an application form, or submit it online (link is contained in the application form).

The guidelines and application form are provided via the following links:

Further information

For further information on applications, after reading the guidelines, email unmarkedgraves@dva.gov.au

See also

Guidelines — Unmarked First World War Graves Funding Assistance Program

The debt of honour owed to those who gave their lives in the service of their country can never be repaid but we demonstrate our gratitude and honour the sacrifice in our cemeteries in Australia and overseas. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is providing funding assistance to mark currently unmarked graves in Australia of veterans of the First World War.

The Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG), within DVA, has established a program whereby individuals or associations might apply for funding to assist in marking an unmarked grave. This is a pilot program that will be available for two years. These guidelines apply to that program.

Who can apply?

Any individuals, non-commercial organisations or community groups, who have an interest in arranging to have a marker placed on a currently unmarked grave in Australia can apply for funding assistance.

What is the eligibility criteria?

In order to be eligible to receive funding assistance the following applies:

- The current unmarked grave is located in Australia and is the grave of a First World War veteran.
- The First World War veteran served in the Australian Forces and died within 20 years of the end of the First World War.
- The applicant has the authority to alter the grave. This may be in the form of having the Right of Burial or in the absence of that, authority from the cemetery where the grave is located.
- The applicant provides a quote for the total cost of the marker.
- More information on eligibility criteria can be found in the accompanying [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#).

What level of funding is available?

Each application received by OAWG will be assessed to decide whether funding can be provided. The funding assistance for this program is capped at \$450 for each application.

Submitting your application

Applicants should provide all information requested on the application form where possible. Applicants are also asked to include a quote for the cost of work to be done and the appropriate authority to alter a grave.

An application form can be downloaded from [Unmarked First World War Graves](#) under the heading 'Applications'.

Once completed, the application should be submitted by using either of the following methods:

Post

Director, Office of Australian War Graves
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
Brisbane QLD 4001

Email

unmarkedgraves@dva.gov.au

How are applications assessed?

Applications that meet all eligibility criteria will be considered by OAWG. If the required documentation is not attached to your application, or further information is required, you will be given the opportunity to provide this.

Applications will be processed within 90 days of receipt of application where possible.

OAWG makes the final decision on each application and applicants will be notified in writing of the decision.

Funding does not denote Commonwealth ownership or responsibility

Funding assistance under this program does not denote Australian Government responsibility for ownership, or maintenance, of a grave marker.

Uses of funding assistance

Funding assistance of up to \$450 may be provided to cover the entire cost of the grave marker, or as a part contribution toward a larger cost, depending on the grave marker that is being arranged.

If the funding assistance is going to be a part contribution to a larger cost, please ensure that your application addresses how you will be funding the remaining costs.

Please note that funding will not be approved for any of the following items:

- expenditure already incurred
- costs associated in obtaining permits or approvals
- the routine repair and maintenance of a grave marker
- future costs associated with the grave or grave marker.

What happens if my application is approved? What are my responsibilities?

The approval and distribution of funding assistance will be decided by OAWG, based on information submitted in the application.

Recipients of the funding assistance will be required to acknowledge receipt of the funding within the specified timeframe in the letter of approval. You will also be required to acquit the funding once their project has been completed. Projects will be expected to be completed within 180 days.

To acquit the funding, recipients will be required to provide documentation verifying funds were spent consistent with the submission and accompanied by photographs

of the installed marker.

The preferred method of payment is by direct credit to the applicable person/ organisation/ contractor's bank account.

Back to [Unmarked First World War Graves](#)

See also [frequently asked questions](#)

Frequently asked questions — Unmarked First World War Graves funding program

The Program

What is this program?

The Unmarked First World War Graves funding program provides funding assistance for individuals or community groups to arrange for a privately placed grave marker for currently unmarked graves in Australia of veterans of the First World War.

How is this different from Official Commemoration?

Official commemoration requires a determination to be made that there is a link between the veteran's death and their war service. If eligible, a marker will be provided at no cost and the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) will maintain the official commemoration in perpetuity.

For this funding assistance, no determination is required to link the cause of death to the veteran's service, however they must have died within 20 years of the First World War ending. If the criteria is met and your application is successful, funding assistance will be provided, however maintenance of the grave marker remains the responsibility of the applicant.

What is an "unmarked grave"?

For the purpose of this program, funding is available to place a private marker on a currently unmarked grave. The current grave must be completely bare of any permanent headstone, plaque or kerbing.

How much funding assistance for each grave marker can I apply for?

The total amount available for each grave marker is capped at \$450 (exclusive of GST).

What if the grave marker I wish to place costs more than the funding assistance that is available through this process?

The funding assistance that is available may be used to contribute to the cost of placing a grave marker. In this case you are encouraged to seek funding through other means, such as but not limited to, community groups or other forms of fundraising.

Authority and approvals

How do I obtain Proof of Service?

You may already hold documentation, if not, you can obtain Proof of Service from the [National Archives of Australia](#). Records of those enlisted in the First World War are fully digitised and can be viewed or printed at no cost.

Who has ownership of the grave?

This is usually referred to as the "Right of Burial" and generally lies with the family of the deceased. To find out who has this right over a grave, please contact the relevant cemetery authority.

What is a cemetery authority?

For large cemeteries it will be the Cemetery Authority on site at the cemetery. In other cases, where the cemetery is smaller, the local council where the cemetery is located will be the authority. Some cemeteries may be managed by someone local to the town where the cemetery is located. If no information is available, please contact the local council who should be able to provide assistance.

What is tenure?

Most states within Australia have in place, or are considering, regulations which limit the tenure of burial licences for graves and niches in some or all of their cemeteries. These tenure periods can range from 25 to 60 years and vary across authorities. We advise that you ask the cemetery authority if tenure applies, if so, when it will expire and what is the cost to renew.

Will the government contribute or pay towards the cost of renewing tenure?

Neither DVA nor OAWG have any responsibility for renewal of tenure. Renewal of tenure is the responsibility of the owner of the grave.

How do I get approval?

Approval to alter the grave can be obtained from the family. If no living family is found, you can provide an approval to alter the grave from the relevant cemetery authority.

What if I cannot locate relatives of the veteran?

You can provide a statutory declaration stating the efforts made to locate relatives of the veteran. Searches for relatives may include checking with the cemetery authority, placing signage at the grave site or advertising in a local newspaper.

Processes

How long will my application take?

Applications can be submitted at any time and will be processed within 90 days of receipt of application where possible.

If my application is not approved, can I apply again? What are the timeframes?

If your application is not approved, you may resubmit at a later stage. The standard processing times of up to 90 days is applied.

Is there a timeframe to complete the grave marker?

The grave marker should be completed within 180 days of the funding being made available.

How do I get a plaque made?

As a general rule foundries that manufacture plaques do not deal directly with the public. If you require assistance on where or how to obtain a plaque please contact the cemetery authority or the local council.

What does the grave marker have to be?

The grave marker should comply with the requirements of the relevant cemetery where the grave is located.

Does the grave marker have to include a service emblem? If so, how do I obtain this?

The marker should include a service emblem to recognise the veteran's service. A letter of permission to incorporate the service emblem will be forwarded to you, with your offer of funding.

Back to [Unmarked First World War Graves](#)



Application for Funding Assistance for Unmarked First World War Graves Program

Completing this form:

- Please refer to the Office of Australian War Graves Unmarked First World War Graves Program Guidelines when completing this application form.
- This application can be completed on screen but if you wish to complete it by hand, please print in blue or black pen.
- If you do not have enough space to complete a question, please attach a separate sheet and number the question.
- Send your completed application form to the Office of Australian War Graves (see address at end of form).
- Please complete all sections of this form, and provide as much information as possible.
- Please ensure that if you are applying for funding of more than one unmarked grave, each application should use a separate application form.

Privacy Notice

The information you provide on this form is required to make a decision in regard to your application for funding assistance. The information will be disclosed to representatives of the Office of Australian War Graves to enable a decision to be made. Successful applications may also be the subject of a media release.

Please note that the Privacy Act does not prevent the disclosure of information to members of the Commonwealth Parliament and a list of recipients of funding administered by Department may be made publicly available. Please also note that information provided on this application will be entered into a register.

[Read more: How DVA manages personal Information](#)

| Part A | Applicant Information |
|--------|-----------------------|
|--------|-----------------------|

APPLICANT CONTACT PERSON

| | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. | Title (Mrs, Miss, Mr etc.) | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 2. | Surname | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 3. | Given name(s) | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 4. | Daytime telephone number(s) (please include area code) | [<input type="text"/>] | Mobile | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. | Email address (if applicable) | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 6. | Postal address | <input type="text"/> | POSTCODE | <input type="text"/> |

APPLICANT ORGANISATION (if applicable)

| | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 7. | Name of Organisation | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 8. | ABN (if applicable) | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 9. | Position title of person applying | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 10. | Branch/sub-branch (if applicable) | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 11. | Postal address | <input type="text"/> | POSTCODE | <input type="text"/> |
| 12. | Telephone number | [<input type="text"/>] | | |

BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS

| | | | | |
|-----|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 13. | Account name | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 14. | Bank name | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 15. | BSB | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| 16. | Account number | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

APPLICANT FUNDING HISTORY

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 17. | Have you previously applied for funding assistance for an Unmarked First World War Grave? | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | ► Go to Part B |
| | | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | ► Date <input type="text"/> |
| 18. | Have you acquitted all funding previously received under this program? | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | ► Give reason |
| | | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="text"/> |

| | |
|--------|--------------------------------|
| Part B | Current Unmarked Grave Details |
|--------|--------------------------------|

DETAILS

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| 19. Name of veteran | <input type="text"/> |
| 20. Date of death | <input type="text" value="/"/> <input type="text" value="/"/> |
| 21. Service number | <input type="text"/> |

LOCATION

| | | |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| 22. Name of cemetery | <input type="text"/> | |
| 23. Address of cemetery | <input type="text"/> | POSTCODE <input type="text"/> |
| 24. Name of cemetery authority | <input type="text"/> | |
| 25. Telephone number of cemetery authority (please include area code) | <input type="text" value="[]"/> | |
| 26. Location of unmarked grave | Section <input type="text"/> Row <input type="text"/> Grave number <input type="text"/> | |
| 27. Does tenure apply at this cemetery? | No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> ► When will it expire? <input type="text" value="/"/> | |

Please note: the Office of Australian War Graves does not have any responsibility for tenure and will not pay for nor contribute to any ongoing maintenance costs.

| | |
|--------|-------------------------|
| Part C | Authority and Approvals |
|--------|-------------------------|

| | |
|---|---|
| 28. Do you have ownership of the grave? | No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> ► Go to Question 30 |
| 29. Do you have support from a relative of the veteran? | No <input type="checkbox"/> ► Please provide evidence stating effort to locate relatives of the veteran Yes <input type="checkbox"/> ► Please attach confirmation of support |
| 30. Have you obtained approval from the appropriate authority to alter the grave? | No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> ► Please attach approval |

Please note: approval must be obtained in order to be eligible to receive funding assistance.

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Part D | Details of Funding Assistance Required |
|---------------|---|

| | |
|---|--|
| 31. Description of proposed grave marker | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 100px;"></div> |
| 32. Quote for the cost of marker attached? | No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> ► Please attach quote. |
| Please note: quote must be provided in order to be eligible to receive funding assistance. | |
| 33. Total amount of funding assistance requested <i>(this is capped at \$450 (excluding GST) per grave marker)</i> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">\$</div> |
| 34. If the funding assistance is going to be a part contribution to a larger cost, please advise how you will fund the remaining costs | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px;"></div> |

| | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| Part E | Application Checklist |
|---------------|------------------------------|

To assist you in successfully processing your application, please ensure you have attached the following documentation where possible. This is supporting documentation of your application.

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Photograph of the grave as it currently is |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Approval from the cemetery authority to alter the grave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Confirmation of support from a relative of the veteran or evidence of efforts made to locate a relative of the veteran |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Proof of service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Quote for the proposed grave marker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other supporting documentation - please specify |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 60px;"></div> | |

Part F**Certification**

All applications must be signed by the applicant or representative of the applicant organisation.

I, the applicant, am aware of the acquittal requirements for this application (you must understand the acquittal requirements of this application, prior to applying for funding. Please see the Application Guidelines).

I hereby certify that all details provided in this application are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

35. Full name

36. Position in organisation *(if applicable)*

37. Date

Once completed, the application can be submitted by either of the following methods:

BY POST

**Office of the Australian War Graves
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
Brisbane QLD 4001**

BY EMAIL

Please click on the EMAIL button below