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## Partner pension blow to war veterans

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**THOUSANDS of veterans from the Vietnam War through to East Timor and Iraq will have to wait an extra eight years for an entitlement which helps their spouses look after them.**

The changes, buried in the detail of the Budget, have emerged in the Parliament with the Opposition describing them as the start of a move to switch veterans entitlements to welfare payments.

From July 1, the age for the partner service pension is to be lifted from 50 to 58 1/2, throwing the plans of hundreds of Vietnam vets into chaos.

Spouses of many more veterans in current conflicts such as Afghanistan and East Timor will no longer be eligible for the entitlement at all.

The lower partner pension age was designed to help veterans with wives or partners, many of whom are younger than them, to quit work and look after them as their war-related health conditions deteriorated.

A Vietnam vet described the changes as "really cruel".

"We had planned for my wife to look after me because it is getting harder for me to work," he said.

The decision to lift the eligibility age will save the Government just \$35 million over the next four years, but hundreds of millions over future years for veterans in current conflicts.

The Government will also deny pensions to partners who are separated from a vet, but still legally married, from January next year.

Despite the changes announced in the May 13 Budget, a "fact sheet" on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website last night was still telling all veterans they were eligible to access their former full entitlements.

A spokeswoman for Veterans' Affairs Minister Alan Griffin said the changes were designed to "correct anomalies" and to "make the system fairer". She said the misinformation on the department's website would be corrected.

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