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Dear Member of Parliament:

On behalf of The Royal Canadian Legion (the Legion) I am sharing our 2021 *"It's our duty"* position paper. This paper outlines our organization's advocacy agenda and includes recommendations for government leaders of all parties. These are the issues we know are essential to the well-being of our Veterans and their families and must be considered seriously.

We develop and update our advocacy positions annually, based on feedback from our members, our experiences working with Veterans and partners across the country, and progress on the mandates presented to Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence.

We are appreciative of government efforts already underway, but we must all strive to do more. Some items have seen no tangible progress for years, which is unacceptable.

Among other priorities, we need to see:

- Immediate tackling of the backlog of disability applications;
- culture change within the CAF related to reporting and handling of sexual misconduct;
- a sharper focus on homelessness including a pan-Canadian strategy to combat Veteran homelessness;
- widespread improvements to the long-term care system.

Our position paper provides a brief outline of specific target areas, and we look forward to working with all elected representatives to improve life for our Veterans and their families.

We will continue to closely monitor progress and share feedback. Canada now has sufficient background and evidence-based input from support organizations to improve things dramatically - right now.

**We ask for fewer reports and meetings to rehash the same problems and concepts, and we need to see immediate action!**

After reading the following information you may forward any questions or comments to me via: [bjulian@legion.ca](mailto:bjulian@legion.ca)

Sincerely,

Bruce Julian  
Dominion President



## ***It's Our Duty 2021: The Royal Canadian Legion Position Paper***

**Immediate** action is required by government to further improve the lives of our Veterans and their families. Underpinning all actions, clear and simplified communication is essential so that Veterans can quickly understand the benefits and services available – and how to access them.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Veterans' Homelessness** – We continue to call for a comprehensive national Veterans' homelessness strategy in Canada, with the goal of helping Veterans get off the streets.

- The strategy should make use of research already present in this domain, and then identify any gaps in knowledge and service delivery.
- It must also be coordinated with the work of other service providers.
- We want evidence of progress on the government's own plan to end homelessness. In June 2019, the government passed Bill M-225 Veteran Homelessness in Canada, with a goal of ending Veteran homelessness by 2025. The plan was supposed to be presented to the House by June 2020, led by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development – and supported by the Minister of Veterans Affairs. To date, we have not received any updates.

**Transition** – The pace of improvement needs to accelerate to better help Veterans transition to civilian life.

- We have yet to see the evidence that military members who are seriously disabled due to service are not being medically released until they are in stable condition, with a VAC case manager assigned.

**Long Term Care** – We ask that the government continue to invest in improvements to Long Term Care (LTC) in Canada, for Veterans and for all our Seniors.

- We want all eligible Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veterans to be granted preferred admission to vacant LTC contract beds when they can no longer stay at home.
- We would like to see an increase in the number of preferred admission beds to accommodate eligible CAF Veterans in facilities other than those that were previously federally owned.

### **RESEARCH AND THERAPIES**

**Psychiatric service dogs** – The Legion continues to advocate for national standards for psychiatric service dogs. The original promise from government to produce standards by 2018 was not kept – nor was the later promise of a VAC replacement version.

- We continue to call for the immediate establishment of consistent standards for service dogs so that additional Veterans can have access to this therapy option, with better safeguards in place for both the Veteran and the service dog.

**Operational Stress Injuries** – We are calling for more research into the causes, impacts and treatment of operational stress injuries – including traumatic brain injuries – in our military and RCMP forces.

- Our government must also continue to increase the work currently being done to help eliminate mental health stigma in the military and RCMP.

**Cannabinoid therapy** – There is still little to no research available in Canada for Veterans or medical practitioners considering this therapy.

- We ask for targeted research, including an investigation into the monitoring and standards related to cannabinoid therapy, the drug’s therapeutic efficacy, and any contraindications.

**Mefloquine toxicity** – We are advocating for research into its use as an anti-malarial drug, and its long-term consequences.

- We ask for government to focus on Veterans who received the drug when deployed.
- We want to see affected individuals receive proper diagnosis and treatment.

## **FAMILIES**

**Family and Caregiver support** – We are pushing for increased support for caregivers in the form of financial compensation.

- We want to see a menu of financial compensation based on lost wages and the degree of disability of the Veteran.
- We call for funding for respite care.
- We propose that access to Military Family Resource Centres be expanded to include all Veterans and their families, post service.

**“Marriage after 60”** – In both 2015 and 2017, the government committed to eliminating this clause, but it still exists. It limits pension and health benefit support for surviving spouses of Veterans who marry after the age of 60. In addition, the announced *Veterans Survivors Fund* has not been implemented.

- The Legion is asking the federal government to fulfill its promise to eliminate the “Marriage after 60” clause.
- We also ask that the *Veteran Survivors Fund* be put in place. Budget 2019 announced the fund, with a commitment of \$150 million over 5 years to support Veterans who married after the age of 60, and their spouses. It was supposed to be implemented no later than December 31, 2020.

## **VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Disability application backlog** – We find it unacceptable to know that some Veterans are waiting for up to and over two years for their claims to be adjudicated. Far too many Veterans are waiting too long for medical treatment and benefits.

- The backlog must become the top priority for VAC in the coming year.
- We want to see a significant reduction in the backlog.

**Wait time tool** – Veterans have access to a wait time tool via their *My VAC* account; however, it shows an average wait time which is unacceptable, stress-inducing, and causing much frustration in the Veteran community.

- This tool needs an immediate update to reflect current and more accurate wait times.

**Veterans Independence Program (VIP)** – We want new legislation to ensure survivors are supported when a Veteran passes away.

- We ask that Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) enact legislation so that *Veteran Independence Program* benefits are automatically transferred to the survivor and if not in immediate need, held in suspension – so that survivors can access them later.

**Collaboration and evolution** – We ask that VAC and DND collaborate more closely to better synchronize programs, reduce complexity, and better serve Veterans - as set out in their mandate letters.

- We would like assurances that government legislation to serve Veterans will evolve – such as parts of the *Veterans Well-being Act* which needs to remain an evergreen document.

## **ADDITIONAL ISSUES**

**Culture within the CAF** – We ask for culture change to help restore member confidence within the CAF when it comes to the reporting of wrongdoing and the subsequent handling of military sexual misconduct complaints.

- We request that the CAF review and upgrade its investigative and disciplinary processes to ensure fairness and restore trust.

**Conduct within the CAF** – The Legion is calling for new oversight in the wake of concerning allegations of sexual misconduct within the CAF.

- We call on government to establish an independent Office of the Inspector General of the CAF and the Department of National Defence, reporting to Parliament.

**Veterans Ombudsman** – We request that the position of Veterans Ombudsman become permanent and independent. We believe its effectiveness is tied to reporting structure.

- This position needs to be enshrined in law and to report directly to Parliament, not VAC.
- The chosen individual needs the freedom to withstand pressures of the system and fight it when needed. Only then can the right solutions be formulated.

**Veterans and the census** – We request an amendment to the next federal census to include all those who stand ready to serve.

- To obtain an accurate picture of Veterans in Canada and the issues affecting them, all categories of reservists need to be included in the next census.