

Government Response to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs' Twelfth Report entitled *National Strategy for Veterans Employment*

The Government of Canada (Government) welcomes the opportunity to respond to recommendations made in the twelfth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA). The Government would like to thank both the Committee, for this report, as well as the witnesses who appeared before the Committee.

The Government is pleased to provide a response to ACVA's recommendations, and highlight the significant efforts that have already been made, and that continue to be made, by the Government to address the concerns regarding Veterans' employment. Some of the Committee's recommendations can further strengthen Veteran Affairs Canada's (VAC or the Department) approach in the development of the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES). The following response provides greater details on the Government's approach to helping Veterans find meaningful employment after service.

The Government is committed to improving the employment opportunities for Veterans, promoting their well-being, and contributing to their success as they transition to civilian life.

Recommendation 1

That Veterans Affairs Canada launch a qualitative research program targeting groups of Veterans most likely to experience career transition challenges.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

VAC recognizes the diversity of its Veterans and applies a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) lens to ensure that its benefits and services meet the diverse needs of all Veterans and their families. The Department has partnered with Statistics Canada to assist with identifying the specific characteristics and needs of equity-deserving Veteran groups, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Veterans; Black or People of Colour Veterans; and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. In fact, a question was added to the 2021 Census in order to identify the Veteran population for the first time in fifty years. According to the 2021 Census, there were 23,075 Veterans (5.2% of the overall Canadian Veteran population) who identified as Indigenous. The Census also identified that nearly one in six Veterans are women.

Developing the NVES highlighted the need for further research to include targeted analysis of women+ and equity-deserving Veterans including those with disabilities, Indigenous Veterans and Veterans who identify as 2SLGBTQI+. VAC is prioritizing research to focus on Veteran sub-populations that are at an increased risk of transition challenges. Following the 2020 report on the Qualitative Study on Transition and the follow-up qualitative study on the experiences of women Veterans in transition, VAC is applying a rigorous GBA Plus approach to our population

health research. For example, the new 2022 Canadian Veteran Health Survey is stratified by age and gender to ensure meaningful representation of women Veterans and different age groups. Similarly, the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey and the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability included supplemental Veteran participants to ensure these sub-populations were represented. These advancements will support more responsive policy development going forward to ensure no Veteran is left behind.

Recommendation 2

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada put in place an individualized support program beginning as soon as a Canadian Armed Forces' member in a higher-risk category begins their release process.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation and is committed to ensuring that members receive the tailored support they need when their release process begins.

Canada's Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* directed the creation of the CAF Transition Group (CAF TG) to help CAF members and their families better prepare for the transition process and navigate the full range of transition resources available. The vision of the CAF TG is that all CAF members will receive transition planning and guided support from professionals located in Transition Centers across the country regardless of their reason for release. Every member is different which means their transition plan needs to be tailored to support their unique needs, particularly those in the higher-risk category such as medically released Veterans, women Veterans, lower-ranking Veterans in combat trades, and Veterans with fewer years of service.

Amongst the various programs and services offered by the CAF, two DND/CAF and VAC joint processes were developed to provide support based on release type (medical and non-medical):

- In 2015 - Enhanced Transition Service (ETS) – Medically Releasing
- In 2018 - Military to Civilian Transition (MCT) – Non-Medically Releasing

Both medical (ETS) and non-medical (MCT) streams support: relationship building between CAF, Military Family Services (MFS) and VAC and with members and their families prior to their release; early engagement, improved coordinated and integrated care and support; improved access to information, benefits and services; and strengthened continuum of care post release.

The CAF-VAC team for ETS consists of CAF Clinical Nurse Case Managers, CAF Service Coordinators, VAC Case Managers and VAC Veteran Service Agents. For MCT the CAF-MFS-VAC team consists of CAF Transition Advisor, CAF Release Administrators, MFS Family Transition Advisor, MFS Family Liaison Officers, VAC Case Managers and VAC Veteran Service Agents.

At VAC, the Veteran Service Team supports transitioning Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Members, Veterans and their families. The team includes: Veterans Service Team Manager, Veteran Service Agents and Case Managers. This team provides support based on the level of assistance that is needed through:

- **Targeted Assistance** is a process to assist in obtaining specific benefits from VAC or other agencies or a referral to outside agencies. This may include reviewing eligibility, completing an application, or registering for departmental benefits. Targeted Assistance is aimed at addressing issues requiring specific staff interventions for a known or limited time period.
- **Guided Support** assists Veterans who require enhanced support and guidance greater than Targeted Assistance and do not require case management. Guided Support also serves to provide a period of additional support to Veterans who have recently completed case management services.
- **Case Management Services** support those facing complex challenges. It is a collaborative process between the individual and family, and the Case Management Team to identify needs, set goals and create a plan to help achieve their highest level of independence, health and well-being.

Recommendation 3

That Veterans Affairs Canada explore ways in which it could expand the eligibility of some of its education and career programs to the spouses of Veterans.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

The Military Spousal Employment Network (MSEN) is an online hub that connects employer partners with a pan-Canadian presence to military partners / spouses seeking employment opportunities. Designed as a part of a suite of employment and entrepreneurship offerings, the MSEN is a conduit to supporting military partners and spouses in finding and maintaining meaningful employment, despite the unique circumstances associated with the military family lifestyle. This free, self-directed resource is for partners / spouses of currently serving and retired CAF members. The MSEN provides access to employment opportunities through a job bank, virtual and in-person career fairs, employment development, and career training.

VAC's Education and Training Benefit (ETB) was implemented in 2018 to recognize Veterans' military service and their commitment to Canada. The benefit provides support to Veterans who wish to attend college, university or technical education institutions, in order to help their successful transition to life after service, achieve their education and employment goals, and better position them to be more competitive in the civilian workforce. In 2022, an internal evaluation of the ETB and Career Transition Services (CTS) found that ETB was meeting Veterans' expectations and helps Veterans achieve their goals. The evaluation determined program eligibility was appropriate, and that client uptake and expenditures for ETB are

forecasted to continue to rise. A Spouse, common-law partner or survivor of a Veteran who completed basic training and who released from the CAF on or after April 1, 2006, or a survivor of a CAF member who completed basic training and who died on or after April 1, 2006, can access services through CTS. Upon application, they may also be eligible for vocational assistance services through VAC's Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program (RSVP).

Policy analysis around ETB is ongoing. With consideration to stakeholder perspectives and other evidence, VAC will consider options to continue to improve or adapt the benefit going forward, in support of evolving client needs and changes in the educational landscape.

Recommendation 4

That the Department of National Defence index the Service Income Security Insurance Plan's vocational rehabilitation program to inflation to address the rising cost of living.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

There is an annual adjustment to the Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits for those on long-term disability. The new adjustment effective January 1, 2024, is 4.73%. These adjustments are posted on the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services website to inform CAF members of the annual rate adjustment. The annual adjustment takes into account the cost of living but is not indexed to inflation.

Recommendation 5

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada establish a system that grants Veterans control over their medical records and allows them to be shared seamlessly with civilian doctors, Veterans Affairs Canada and service providers at the Veterans' discretion.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Department of National Defence (DND)/CAF remains in constant communication with VAC to ensure the timely response and release of a member's medical records, particularly for urgent requests. Upon the request and consent of the Veteran, medical records can be released to a civilian doctor, VAC and service providers at the Veteran's discretion. To enhance DND/CAF's ability to seamlessly share a member's health record, DND/CAF is working closely with Canada Post Connect to share information quickly and securely through electronic mail. In addition, as part of the release process, members can receive a full electronic copy of their medical and dental records (on an Universal Serial Bus or USB stick) to ensure they have

possession of all their records upon release. All personnel have the right to ask for a copy of their full medical records.

Recommendation 6

That Veterans Affairs Canada has a role in supporting the releasing military members and finding civilian medical professionals and should work closely with the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group on this matter.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

The Government agrees that it has an important role in supporting releasing military members.

Finding a primary Health Care professional (Family Doctor or Nurse Practitioner) is a common issue for many Canadians. For Veterans and their families, it remains a significant challenge that can have a direct impact to their transition. While health care is a matter of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the Government recognizes the value of supporting Veterans so they can experience a continuity of care until they can find a civilian medical professional.

The Veterans Family Telemedicine Service is a pilot program that provides medically released Veterans of the CAF and their families, one year of virtual physician access at the time of their release from the CAF. This service works to ensure timely access to a primary care physician during the first year of transition, and is currently offered as part of the Veteran Family program delivered by Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. Since January 2022, over 1,900 consultations have been conducted with a general practitioner, representing over 980 individual Veteran families.

Recommendation 7

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada harmonize their respective vocational rehabilitation programs to better enable a seamless transition.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Government recognizes the importance of a seamless transition and support for Veterans, particularly in the context of vocational rehabilitation.

VAC is currently engaged in an evaluation of the Rehabilitation Program that supports its standards for consistent program and service excellence, best practices, and quality assurance. VAC is always searching for ways to improve our programs and services and working relationship with DND. As such, we look forward to the evaluation's findings and

recommendations. Additionally, ongoing engagement with our stakeholders including Veterans and their families and Veterans' organizations, are invaluable in the harmonization process with DND, as well as shaping the future of our programs and service delivery.

DND/CAF and VAC's vocational rehabilitation programs (VRP) are aligned in the sense that the CAF Long-term Disability (LTD) Vocational Rehabilitation Program (CAF LTD VRP) covers CAF members from six months prior to release until 24 months after date of release. VAC VRP is available to Veterans, survivors, spouses after or in lieu of the CAF LTD program after release. The two programs are meant to be complementary to one another for eligible persons. This ensures that releasing members and their spouses are supported throughout the transition process.

More specifically, the CAF LTD VRP is a program managed by Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) Manulife that provides training and education to prepare members for transition to civilian employment. The program is offered to all Regular Force and Reserve Force members who qualify for CAF LTD, including non-medical releases who meet eligibility criteria and supports both service and non-service-related requirements. The program provides degree funding if the program can be completed within 24 months of release.

In comparison, the VAC Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program (RSVP) provides eligible Veterans, survivors or spouse/common-law partners with rehabilitation services and vocational assistance and training for existing or new skills and is intended for persons with vocational needs resulting primarily from service. It is intended for members with a health problem (temporary or permanent) resulting primarily from service that is causing a barrier to re-establishment at home, at work, or in the community.

Recommendation 8

That the Office of the Auditor General conduct a review of all career transition programs offered by the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

The Office of the Auditor General has advised that they will respond directly to the Committee on this matter. VAC will do regular check-ins with the Office of the Auditor General and would welcome a performance audit should the Office of the Auditor General deem it appropriate.

Recommendation 9

That Veterans Affairs Canada review its Career Transition Services program and the terms of the contract with its supplier to ensure that Canadian Armed Forces members, Veterans and members of their families receive these services at the level of quality they are entitled to.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Since it first became available in 2006, VAC's Career Transition Services (CTS) have been redesigned and updated to expand the eligibility for spouses, common-law partners and CAF members; to remove time limits for Veterans and survivors to access benefits; and to simplify the application process.

Agilec has been the national CTS provider since April 2018. The current contract was implemented in January 2023. Recent contract changes include improved alignment with current Government policies on digital, accessibility and inclusion. In addition, 15 online learning modules were updated on the CTS portal, and VAC reviewed its communications and training materials to implement enhancements that provide accurate and timely program information for transitioning CAF members, Veterans and their families, and for the front-line staff who assist them.

CTS provides registered participants with direct access to a tiered suite of services tailored to their individual needs which can include virtual meetings with a professional Employment Coach, goal setting, assessment of skills and aptitudes, help with resume-writing, networking, and job placement.

VAC conducted an evaluation of the Education and Training Benefit (ETB) and CTS in 2022. This evaluation found that ETB was meeting Veterans' expectations and helps Veterans achieve their goals. The evaluation determined that eligibility is appropriate for both programs. CTS and ETB generally work well together, particularly for Veterans who access education planning services through CTS. VAC continuously monitors CTS delivery to ensure the provider meets the requirements of the contract, while adjusting processes to meet participants' evolving needs.

Recommendation 10

That Veterans Affairs Canada establish a platform where employers can contact Veterans seeking employment opportunities directly.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The need to connect Veterans and employers was a key takeaway during our roundtable consultations with Veterans, employers, stakeholders and partners in developing the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES).

VAC is working with CAF Transition Group and other stakeholders to identify the essential criteria for new or existing tools that can offer a reliable and accessible means of connecting Veterans with Canadian employers across industry sectors. VAC is also looking at other options for networking and information sharing with our partners and stakeholders to build meaningful

connections and improve Veteran employment outcomes. For example, in 2021, VAC launched the “Hire A Veteran” LinkedIn Group to connect Canadian Veterans with real-time job opportunities. VAC manages the group membership, which is currently at approximately 5,000, and also hosts a series of Veterans Employment webinars throughout the year. To date, the webinars have attracted approximately 3,000 registered participants (transitioning CAF members, Veterans and their families), and featured 20 Federal departments/agencies and over 100 private sector companies.

Recommendation 11

That, acknowledging that the uptake of the education and training program is lower than expected, Veterans Affairs Canada review the program and expand the eligibility criteria, particularly to include Veterans who are released for medical reasons before they accumulated the required six years of service.

Government Response

The Government takes note of the recommendation.

The Departmental evaluation of the Education and Training Benefit (ETB) and Career Transition Services (CTS) in 2022 found that ETB was meeting Veterans’ expectations and helps Veterans achieve their goals. The evaluation determined that program eligibility was appropriate, and that client uptake and expenditures for ETB are forecasted to continue to rise. The evaluation included a recommendation to improve program communications among members and Veterans to clarify that ETB applicants need to complete a two-step application process to be approved for funding. VAC has made many improvements to communicate efforts about the ETB over the last two years. This includes the creation of a new fact sheet for distribution to the Veteran community by external stakeholders, improvement to the application guide, and regular ETB messaging and reminders to existing ETB clients are posted to VAC’s Facebook, LinkedIn, X social media platforms. As well, ETB has been promoted to the Transition Centres and to CAF representatives, so staff can provide program options to still serving members that are planning for their release. VAC is planning more educational sessions for Transition Centres staff in the near future, to include additional representation from the CAF. In addition, a new web page and fact sheet were released specifically for educational institutions.

Policy analysis around ETB is ongoing. VAC will support and address evolving client needs and changes in the educational landscape. With consideration to stakeholders’ perspectives and other evidence, the Department will consider options to continue to improve or adapt the ETB going forward.

Recommendation 12

That eligible Canadian Armed Forces members who have transferred from the Regular Force to the Primary Reserve Force can receive the Education and Training Benefit while they are

still serving in the Primary Reserve Force.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

A member of the Regular Force who transfers to the Primary Reserves remains a serving member of the CAF. Under current VAC legislation, an Education and Training Benefit (ETB) may be paid to a Veteran, meaning a former member of the CAF or a member of the Supplementary Reserve.

VAC and CAF have recently established a Policy and Research Working Group to share best practices in policy and research development and to establish joint priorities. As part of this initiative, VAC will work with the CAF to consider eligibility requirements for the Education and Training Benefit, including whether the program, as currently designed, is having any unintended impacts.

Recommendation 13

That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence harmonize the criteria for training eligible for funding through the Education and Training Benefit and the Service Income Security Insurance Plan and ensure that medically releasing Canadian Armed Forces members can receive the Education and Training Benefit when they are still serving.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

The VAC Education and Training Benefit (ETB) is a social program, and the Canadian Armed Forces Long-Term Disability Vocational Rehabilitation Program (CAF LTD VRP) is an insurance program. Therefore, they are distinct programs designed to meet the differing needs of Veterans in different circumstances.

The Canadian Armed Forces Long Term Disability (CAF LTD) plan is a group insurance plan for eligible CAF personnel who have been medically released, or have been assessed as totally disabled at release by the insurer. CAF LTD provides income replacement benefits, as well as advice and financial support for vocational rehabilitation. Specifically, the CAF LTD Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VRP) provides transition counselling, vocational retraining, and employment search assistance up to six months prior to release and 2 years after release, or for as long as personnel continue to meet the requirements for CAF LTD benefits eligibility.

The VAC ETB is available to Veterans who were honourably released from the CAF and who served a minimum of six years in the Regular Force or Reserve Force or a combination of both. The benefit is taxable and provides funding (up to \$92,392.30 – 2023 maximum rate) to cover mandatory education costs and some incidental and living expenses, for Veterans enrolled in

eligible educational programs(e.g., college or university degree). A portion of funding may be used for fees and costs associated with one-time courses aimed at self-fulfillment and personal interest and development.

Recommendation 14

That Veterans Affairs Canada lead by example in Veteran employment and set recruitment targets to increase the proportion of Veterans that it employs, ensure that these targets are set with a written and accessible plan to meet them, establish a clear means of determining whether these targets are being met, and if needed implement an action plan to improve these targets.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

VAC is actively engaging with other federal departments and central agencies to establish a federal public service solution that will automate the tracking of Veterans hiring. A more standardized and centralized data management process would allow the federal public service to effectively benchmark, set targets, and show progress of the various recruitment strategies that are being tailored to the Veterans population. VAC does and will continue to prioritize Veterans hiring across the department.

The Department will also continue to work with other federal departments in applying all provisions available to increase Veterans hires and their participation in civilian life including all provisions under the *Public Service Employment Act*.

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada explore ways to give preference in federal public service hiring to the spouses of Veterans and serving military members.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

Government organizations such as VAC and the Public Service Commission are actively working together on issues related to improvements in public service employment for Veterans, and will explore ways to enhance hiring opportunities for spouses, common law partners, and survivors of CAF members and Veterans. Pursuant to the Federal Public Service Employment Priority Appointment, eligible CAF members must request priority entitlement within five years from their final date of release. In addition, the Military Spousal Employment Network is offered to partners/spouses of both serving and retired members.

Recommendation 16

That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence establish criteria of recognition for and publicize a list of companies committed to priority hiring, retention and accommodation of Veterans.

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

VAC will continue the engagement and collaboration with a range of employer representatives and external organizations through its Veterans Employment Unit. The goal is to educate, advocate and support Veteran hiring initiatives across all levels of public administration and the private sector, and with third party and not-for profit organizations.

Additionally, the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES) provides for a cohesive framework or portal that Veterans and employers can access. VAC is working with CAF Transition Group and other stakeholders to identify the essential criteria for new or existing tools that can provide a reliable and accessible means of connecting Veterans with accredited employers across industry sectors. For example, DND/CAF is creating a National Resource Directory (NRD) containing information about organizations across all sectors in Canadian society (including employers) who want to hire and support transitioning military members, Veterans, and families. As part of the onboarding process, organizations are asked to self-assess and categorize their ability to support these populations. Organizations that have more tangible supports in place to help transitioning military, Veteran and family (MVF) populations are categorized as 'MVF ready'. For example, this could include companies that have MVF as a part of their organizational strategy, staff who are trained to understand and recognize military experience, and / or dedicated professional development programs for transitioning military members or Veterans. Organizations that may have less robust supports but are keen to support Veterans are also part of the NRD, and are afforded the opportunity to connect with more well-established entities in this space. This approach ensures that DND/CAF can help facilitate a strong network where organizations can share best practices, and the MVF community can access a trusted support network of MVF-ready organizations. This approach helps ensure that the NRD network continues to grow, thus enhancing the number of career options and employers available to the MVF community.

Recommendation 17

That, at the first one-on-one meetings with releasing Canadian Armed Forces members or recently released Veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada implement a process that systematically presents every one of its programs and the needs each program fills.

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

Each person's transition experience is unique, as it is customized to their situation in order to best support each Veteran and their family in their transition to civilian life. To maximize the level of support provided to a releasing member and increase the uptake of VAC programming, it is critical to socialize programming throughout a CAF member's career well before they

decide to release. As outlined in Canada's Defence Policy, *Strong Secure, Engaged*, CAF Transition Group (CAF TG) engages with members early in their transition journey to start their release administration to ensure that all benefits will be in place before a member transition to post-military life. Some release-related benefits cannot be paid out until after the release date, but the administration can be completed to significantly reduce delays. In addition to having a VAC representation in the CAF Transition Centre, a web service has been created between CAF and VAC to provide timely advanced notification concerning a member's intent to transition. VAC is then prepared to receive applications, access CAF data required for verifying entitlements / calculating benefits, and provide a decision before the release date. CAF TG, SISIP, and VAC co-operate early in the process to provide ill and injured members with information on CAF LTD and VAC Income Replacement Benefit (IRB). The transition support workflows have been incorporated into the CAF Release Application (CAFRA) system and the inclusion of the casualty support workflows is well underway. Eventually, all CAF TC staff will have full visibility of a member's progress in executing their transition plan, be able to intervene when necessary, and measure performance against established standards. CAF personnel with complex transition needs who can no longer serve in the Regular or Reserve Force, could be provided with a longer transition period before turning to civilian life.

To help CAF members and their families better prepare for the transition process and navigate the full range of transition resources available, DND/CAF continues to develop many communication tools and web applications. The continued promotion of existing and new tools, programs, and services, as well as the promotion of CAF TG related events on social media is just one example of effort to increase awareness and buy-in from our target audiences including CAF members and their families, Veterans and their families.

The Digital Transition Center (DTC) is a virtual 'one-stop shop' available via internet for research and initiating contact with a guided support team. From the DTC, a member has access to the My Transition Guide, My Transition 101 Course, an appointment scheduling tool, and a link to the My VAC Account Website. The member also has access to the full complement of the 'My Transition Seminar' (formerly known as Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN)). The DTC will be the location to populate their personalized, individual transition plan and receive comments and advice from CAF and VAC professionals.

Once a member decides to release, an initial meeting with a CAF Transition Advisor or Service Coordinator includes a referral for a VAC Transition Interview for recommendations on eligible services, benefits and programs from VAC. The VAC Transition Interview involves a screening to identify any unmet needs, support levels required and any risk for unsuccessful transition. Information is provided on eligible programs and services along with any community support recommendations. This enables full collaboration between CAF Transition Advisors, Service Coordinators, Nurse Case Managers, VAC Case Managers and VAC Veteran Service Agents for transitioning members. This ensures VAC is aware of any relevant issues to enable more fulsome support earlier in the transition process.

In addition to the VAC Transition Interview, there are many other resources at VAC to support

CAF members' transition to life after service such as:

- (a) Veteran Family Program - an expansion of the Military Family Services Program to offer services to medical releasing members, Veterans and their families.
- (b) Veteran Family Telemedicine Service Pilot - is available to medically released Veterans and their families who released on or after January 3, 2021. The service gives families who do not yet have a Family Physician a one year license to access a nationwide Telemedicine Service 24 hours a day at no cost to the Veteran or family members.
- (c) Transition Training - My Transition 101 was released in September 2023. This is a self-directed E-learning course aimed at preparing members for their military to civilian transition.
- (d) Member Transition Task List – an interactive checklist on My VAC Account, provided as part of a CAF member's release process. It helps to guide the member through the administrative tasks they need to complete as they transition to post-service life.
- (e) My Well-being Check-in Tool - The new My Well-being Check-in Tool allows current and former CAF and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members to check in on their well-being and learn about specific services and benefits that may help them. The tool has eight questions which takes about two minutes to complete. Users can download, save or print their information. Results are private and will not be shared with VAC, CAF or the RCMP.

Taken together, these services offer timely information and opportunities to help CAF members prepare for the next phase of their life.

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada implement the recommendations made in the report published by the True Patriot Love Foundation entitled *Supporting Veterans through their transition to civilian employment in Canada*.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

There are existing programs and services that have been implemented that align with some of the recommendations noted in the True Patriot Love report. One such program is the one for post-secondary institutions to recognize military training and skills acquired in the military as education credits such as the *Institute for Veterans Education and Transition (IVET)* program through the University of British Columbia. This program allows Veterans to receive academic credits for some of their experience and service in the military and fast track towards a certificate. As well, the Legion military skills conversion program is another similar program at the B.C. Institute of Technology.

Recommendation 19

That Veterans Affairs Canada establish a permanent working table on training and career transition for Veterans and their family members.

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Veterans and their families are supported by government and non-government organizations that act as a layered network, extending from the local to the national level.

The Government is committed to ensuring that serving members, Veterans, and their families are well-informed and receive the professional, standardized, and personalized support they need for a successful transition. That is why in 2017 DND/CAF and the Joint Seamless Transition Task Force (STTF), which is co-chaired by CAF and VAC staff, created a focus group dedicated to addressing training and education, employment, and other career transition issues. The aim of the STTF is to ensure a seamless and joint approach to policies, programs, and transition services. The Task Force meets quarterly and provides a report to leadership in both CAF and VAC.

The Canadian Military, Veteran and Family Connected Campus Consortium (CMVF3C) is a recently established strategic partnership between VAC, the CAF, and participating post-secondary institutions. The consortium supports the academic success of Veterans, and recognizes the skills and experience of military members to grant equivalencies for entrance to programs at an appropriate level. CMVF3C promotes the establishment of campuses that support the academic success and well-being of military members, Veterans, and their families.

These relationships present an opportunity to discuss and progress Veteran employment issues, and to achieve improved alignment and partnerships that promote unity of effort and ensure the best possible outcomes for Veterans and their families.

Recommendation 20

That Veterans Affairs Canada, as part of the vocational component of its Rehabilitation Program, as well as for its career transition initiatives, ensure that ambassadors are put in place who are responsible for creating strategic partnerships for Veterans with Canadian companies.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Government recognizes the importance of creating strategic partnerships for Veterans with Canadian companies. For Veterans who qualify for the program, the Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program currently provides the following vocational supports through its national service provider:

- (a) Job Development: Individualized mentoring, training and evaluation on the job by a qualified job coach.
- (b) Job Coaching: A service to assist individuals in preparing for, securing and maintaining gainful employment.
- (c) Job Placement Facilitation and Support: A process of locating and supporting a specific job on behalf of a participant, by working with various community resources on behalf of participants, who require in-depth assistance.

Job Development is a core service offered by our National Contractor, Partners in Canadian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (PCVRS). Job Development services are utilized to support Veterans to facilitate finding prospective employer(s) for consideration of qualified employees for employment. In addition, PCVRS maintains an employer list that they can use to connect Veterans with organizations for employment opportunities.

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Canada encourage Veteran employee resource groups and peer support networks in workplaces where Veterans are employed.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

An important takeaway from the consultations that VAC conducted to develop the NVES was the positive effect on retention described by employers, educational institutions and others that provided a welcoming environment when Veterans joined their organizations.

The Government recognizes this effect, and VAC is working with its partners and stakeholders to identify, champion and learn from organizations that offer this important feature. Along with the CAF Transition Group, VAC also aims to enhance awareness about the programs, benefits and services that are available to help transitioning members and Veterans with their post-military career plans such as Career Transition Services, the Education Training Benefit, and Vocational assistance, in addition to the supports available through Military Family Services and a range of other public and private sector initiatives, including those at the provincial level and in communities.

Recommendation 22

That Veterans Affairs Canada direct more effort toward increasing retention amongst Veterans in civilian positions.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

VAC engages with Canadian employers, partners and stakeholders to raise awareness and promote initiatives that improve Veteran employment opportunities across the public and private sectors. For example, in 2021-22, Challenge Factory used funding from the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund to create companion tools to accompany *The Canadian Guide to Hiring Veterans*, a publication that helps small and medium sized businesses hire and retain Veterans. Lessons learned about new approaches for the retention of Veteran talent are shared in multiple forums and in human resource planning. These considerations are a part of the ongoing work related to the NVES.

Recommendation 23

That the Government of Canada, when developing its national strategy for Veterans' employment, encourage a dialogue between employers and Veterans in order to further mutual understanding and respect.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

In developing the NVES, VAC conducted a broad-based analysis of the Veteran employment landscape and engaged with stakeholders to gain insight, which included:

- Reviewing the needs of Veterans and existing supports for Veteran employment;
- Reviewing existing research materials, program data and Census results;
- Reviewing the supports and best practices used by Five Eyes international partners.

A comprehensive series of consultations was held with Veterans, their families and a cross section of representatives from Canadian industry, Unions, employers, post-secondary institutions, the federal public service and equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. Several common themes and insights emerged from these consultations, especially the importance of recognizing that a military to civilian transition is different and it is a unique experience for each Veteran.

Recommendation 24

That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence develop the National Employment Strategy for Veterans based on principles that place the overall personality of each Veteran at the centre of the strategy, so as to allow each Veteran to take ownership of his or her career path rather than restricting opportunities to a specific match between certain skills and certain jobs.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Veterans are at the centre of the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES) development process. Series of consultations were conducted to help build the NVES around Veterans' unique needs, and the consultations would continue to ensure that the related VAC benefits and services are also tailored to support their employment needs as individuals – e.g., Career Transition Services, the Education and Training Benefit and Vocational Rehabilitation Services, etc. Being Veteran-centric also means to be focused on the emerging needs of each Veteran, and enabling their smooth transition from the CAF with opportunities for meaningful employment in the career of their choice while respecting any medical limitations or restrictions in a future career where appropriate.

DND/CAF and VAC are closely aligned in developing the key pillars of the NVES for Veterans. DND/CAF is supporting the development of the Strategy to facilitate the connection with perspectives and ideas from outside organizations to help shape discussions which will inform the Strategy. This will ensure the Strategy is inclusive of different perspectives and is flexible to meet the needs of individual Veterans.

Recommendation 25

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada, in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, implement a program that recognizes prior learning, including skills and training received in the Canadian Armed Forces, so that Veterans can acquire credits toward a civilian certification, diploma or degree.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

There are many government and non-government organizations that support Veterans' needs.

The Government is committed to connecting Veterans with resources, services, and supports that enable them to attain their civilian career goals after they leave the military, and is working in conjunction with the University of Alberta to support the launch of a national education consortium. VAC has been engaged with the consortium, as part of the National Veterans Employment Strategy and the key to understanding the skills that Veterans gain from their service, how those apply to any educational needs, as Veterans prepare to enter the civilian workforce. This includes recognizing the skills and experience of these students to grant equivalencies and allow them to enter programs at an appropriate level. The consortium is newly formed and will continue to be developed by the strategic partners. To date, it comprises of 80 colleges and universities across the country, and is continuing to expand as more post-secondary institutions express interest and sign on.

The CAF has implemented the My Skills and Education Translator (MySET), which is a digital platform that allows post-secondary institutions to assist CAF members and Veterans by providing a centralized resource that can be used to identify which post-secondary institutions recognize prior military training and education. This may be in the form of civilian equivalency, accreditation of specific occupation training, experience, or a combination thereof. Participation by post-secondary institutions in the MySET application is facilitated by the education consortium and is open to any accredited academic or vocational institution that wants to provide equivalencies and advanced standing to military members and Veterans, even if they do not belong to the consortium. It is available on the internet to both serving members and Veterans as part of the Digital Transition Center (DTC) located at the Canada.ca website.

Recommendation 26

That the Department of National Defence, together with the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada, work to improve the transferability of military skills and training to civilian careers.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation.

There are many professional regulatory and certifying bodies involved in the civilian accreditation of military occupational training and experience, including industry and employer organizations, academic institutions and various levels of government. The Government works with partner organizations to develop opportunities and improved resources that offer timely and relevant assistance for CAF members and Veterans to prepare for their lives after service.

As part of the Canadian Military, Veteran, and Family Connected Campus Consortium, DND/CAF has commenced a Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition Working Group (PLAR WG). The PLAR WG was stood up in October 2023 and is comprised of both civilian and military subject matter experts who are working to align military training learning outcomes with those in civilian academia and industry. VAC will be working with partners to develop a skills translation tool to help improve the transferability of military skills and training to civilian careers.

Currently, the primary resources include Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN) seminars, digital transition tools and VAC's Career Transition Services. In future, such resources will be available throughout a member's service, as well as during the CAF release process and thereafter.

Recommendation 27

That the Department of National Defence, together with the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada, ensure that training programs to acquire new skills that are under one year can be offered to releasing members.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program for Serving Members (VRPSM), a component of the CAF Long Term Disability Vocational Rehabilitation Program (LTD VRP) can support educational training programs for medically releasing CAF members, from six months before release until 24 months after release (up to a maximum of 30 months in duration), if the training leads to a certified skill, diploma, or degree. This allows medically released members or Veterans to select the educational opportunity offered by civilian institutions that is suitable to them and does not exceed the 30-month maximum. For those programs that may be longer in nature, VAC can also provide additional coverage to medically releasing members as a part of their VAC Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Recommendation 28

That the Department of National Defence, together with Public Safety Canada and the other federal institutions involved, develop a way to fast-track the acquisition of security clearances for Veterans who recently held clearances in the past with an aim to reducing the administrative burden on the Canadian Armed Forces member upon release and transition.

Government Response

The Government takes note of this recommendation.

The Government is committed to supporting Veterans as they transition to civilian life including through facilitating the timely reacquisition of reliability statuses and security clearances. The Government is taking measures to increase the capacity of the security screening system which will result in accelerated processing timelines without making any compromises on security verifications.

Existing policies, directives, and processes facilitate the reacquisition of reliability statuses and security clearances for Veterans to ease the transition to civilian life. *National Defence Security Orders and Directives Chap 4, S 4B.35 - Reactivation and Expiry* allows for a security clearance to be reactivated within 12 months or a reliability status to be reactivated within 24 months, without requiring a security screening when a DND employee has terminated employment or a CAF member has released from service, or if they have taken a leave of absence from DND or the CAF and have subsequently returned; and there is no adverse information; or security waiver on file. When a reliability status or security clearance is required for employment outside National Defence, upon request from the receiving department or agency, National Defence can reactivate and transfer an individual's reliability status and security clearance if it meets the conditions set out in *NDSOD Chap 4, S 4B.35*. This reactivation process ensures that reliability statuses or security clearances can be reacquired quickly for individuals, including Veterans, without compromising on security verifications.

Departments and agencies with security, defence, and intelligence mandates currently have backlogs of individuals that need to be processed through personnel security screening programs in view of obtaining the appropriate reliability status or security clearance. Due to these backlogs, security screenings are prioritized based on organizational requirements. Currently, as set out in *NDSOD Chap 4, S 4B.38*, the following priorities have been identified for application within the individual security screening program:

- Priority 1: Reliability status for all new CAF applicants and DND employees.
- Priority 2: Urgent or Priority Security Clearance requests (all levels) for CAF operational deployments and out-of-country postings.
- Priority 3: Reactivation and Transfer Security Clearance requests (all levels) including transfers from other government departments.
- Priority 4: New, Update and Upgrade Security Clearance requests (all levels).

The Government believes that the prioritization of security screening activities should continue to be based on organizational priorities to minimize any potential impacts of security screening timelines on operations.

DND/CAF is already implementing measures to improve security clearance processing timelines which will accelerate the re-acquisition of reliability status and security clearance for Veterans. National Defence is reviewing its entire security clearance processing enterprise to optimize all relevant tools, structures, and processes. This includes replacing outdated processing systems with redefined technical requirements. This high priority initiative is a key element of CAF Reconstitution efforts and supports several departmental objectives.

This approach will ensure that Veterans are supported through their transition to civilian life while ensuring that reliability statuses and security clearances are processed with appropriate due diligence and in a timely manner to enable the Government to advance Canadian interests and keep Canadians safe.

Recommendation 29

That Veterans Affairs Canada, in developing the National Veterans Employment Strategy, propose initiatives to support and guide Veterans wanting to become entrepreneurs

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

Veterans are a highly skilled and experienced workforce, although they can experience challenges with recognition of qualifications by employers and transferability of skills. Veterans are looking for options in the labour market (public service, private sector, self-

employment). The latest Canadian Census found 12% of Veterans received income through self-employment.

VAC supports targeted research and policy analysis on Veteran self-employment and entrepreneurship, recognizing there are a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations and for-profit enterprises that offer support to Veteran entrepreneurs in the form of business and start-up advice, as well as other federal and provincial programs that are available to all Canadians starting businesses. A key consideration for the NVES is to build strategic partnerships across government and leveraging both government and community-based programming.

Recommendation 30

That Veterans Affairs Canada draw inspiration from the American program “The Mission Continues” and implement an initiative highlighting volunteer and community service opportunities for Veterans making a career transition. This should include opportunities for peer support and mentorship of fellow Veterans.

Government Response

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The Government currently provides funding through VAC’s Veteran and Family Well-being Fund (VFWF) to organizations that promote volunteerism for Veterans. Team Rubicon Canada is a registered non-profit organization that serves Canadian and global communities before, during and after disaster and crises. With funding from the VFWF, Team Rubicon mobilizes Veterans to continue their service in a volunteer capacity and provides training to enhance Veteran participants’ employability in emergency management in their life after service. True Patriot Love Foundation also received funding through VFWF for a project that addresses the loss of purpose that can occur when Veterans transition to life after service. The project will develop a National Action Plan on Veteran Volunteerism that will support their well-being.