



Veterans Affairs
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Anciens Combattants
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Speaking notes for

Notes d'allocution de

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Veteran Service Team Manager

“What’s new at VAC”

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Speaking role

Length: approx. 10-12 minutes (~1,200 words)

Audience: Attendees to the Manitoba / NW Ontario RCL Provincial Command
Convention

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against delivery*

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prononcé fait foi*

Canada

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is Lisa Heshka, Veterans Service Team Manager for the Prairie Area at Veterans Affairs Canada. Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today.

I want to start by giving a nod to the important work that this group does, from the community to the national level. From commemoration to advocacy, and in promoting pride in our country and accomplishments, we appreciate everything you do.

Building a bridge between the Veteran community, Veterans Affairs Canada and the wider community is one of the most important things you do.

That's why, as part of Veterans Affairs, I would like to ask you to help spread the word about the big changes happening. You've probably heard about the latest: Pension for Life.

With Pension for Life in effect as of April 1, I am proud to say that we now have a complete suite of supports in place for Veterans. These include financial support for all Veterans; critical physical and mental health supports; and support to make a successful transition to a new life after service in the civilian community.

[Financial support]

Pension for Life provides recognition, income support and stability to eligible Veterans with service-related injury or illness. They now have the option of choosing a monthly payment, for life, up to \$1,150 per month, in compensation for the pain and suffering they experience as a result of service-related illness or injury. Veterans can also choose to take this as a single lump sum.

Additional compensation, up to \$1,500 a month, is available for those who experience barriers to establishing in life after service because of a severe and permanent impairment.

Eligible Veterans in rehabilitation may also be eligible to receive income replacement support of 90 percent of their pre-release salary.

The integrated package of benefits encompass the family and caregivers of injured Veterans. The Caregiver Recognition Benefit provides over \$1,000 per month, tax free, to family members or others who care for Veterans.

Spouses, common-law partners and survivors of eligible Veterans may be eligible for vocational assistance services. We have removed the time limit to access these services so they have the time they need to adapt to their new lives after service, and choose the time that's right for them to address their vocational needs.

If a Veteran is facing an urgent, unforeseen financial crisis, the Veterans Emergency Fund can provide immediate relief. In its first year alone, it provided emergency funding to almost 600 Veterans and their families.

[Health and well-being]

A successful transition to life after service depends on the Veteran's overall well-being. We can refer Veterans to a full range of physical, social and mental health services.

The VAC Assistance Service, for example, offers a toll-free help line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It can refer Veterans to professional psychological support, bereavement support, pastoral outreach, and other services.

The Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada are partners in the Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) network, which operates in 33 locations nationwide.

Additionally, Veterans Affairs funds a network of Operational Stress Injury Clinics with 19 service sites across the country. Teams of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses and other specialists provide specialized mental health assessment.

Others can be referred to our national network of some 4,000 qualified mental health professionals across Canada.

National Defence and Veterans Affairs have developed the Joint CAF-VAC Suicide Prevention Strategy to help reduce risks, build resilience and prevent suicide among our military members and Veterans.

Veterans Affairs is also funding the establishment of a new Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Related Mental Health Conditions. It will lead to new knowledge about effective assessment and treatment, to be shared with mental health practitioners across the country.

[Transition support]

Releasing from service for whatever reason is a dramatic transition from a way of life that members may have known for decades. It's our job at Veterans Affairs Canada to help them make that transition successfully, and to support their family as well.

This support begins **before** release from the military, with a transition interview. Here, Veterans Affairs staff informs them about all the benefits, services and programs they could be eligible for from Veterans Affairs.

Career Transition Services includes one-on-one career counselling, advice on job prospects; and help with writing resumes and interview preparation.

Veterans with at least six years of service can be eligible for up to \$40,960 in education funding. Those with over 12 years' service can access up to \$81,920.

As of the beginning of this year, more than 1,200 Veterans and spouses have opened a Career Transition Services plan and worked with VAC's national service provider.

The transition can be challenging for families, as well. That's why we've opened the Veteran Family Program to families of medically releasing Veterans at Military Family Resource Centres across the country.

There have been a lot of changes over the past couple of years. There's also been a huge increase in the number of applications for benefits. That's because we're taking the initiative to make sure that Veterans know all the benefits available.

[*pause*]

While we provide and fund a complete, integrated suite of programs to promote the well-being of Veterans and their families, we cannot do it alone. You folks here do much of the heavy lifting.

Pride in their service and contributions is a defining factor of a Veteran's well-being. So are continued connections to the military community in which many spent most of their lives.

That's why commemoration is so important. I'm proud of the role that you have always played. You have instilled pride among Canadians for the accomplishments of our women and men in uniform, as well as remembrance of their sacrifice.

I know that you will continue to do so. Last year was a landmark for commemoration. We marked the centennial of Canada's Hundred Days and the end of the First World War, as well as the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Sicily. 2018 also saw the 10th National Peacekeepers' Day and the 65th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice.

This year we will mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. We will also commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Scheldt fought in Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as the 75th anniversary of the Italian Campaign. Canadians achieved and sacrificed so much, leaving a lasting legacy of peace.

2019 also marks the 5th anniversary of the end of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

I know that you will be an important part of these commemorations.

The message I want to leave you with today is to carry on with this. And to reach out to the whole of the Veteran community. There are nearly 650,000 Veterans in Canada. They come from every walk of life. They are our neighbours, our friends, our family. They are prominent in every community in the country. And every year, some 8,000 CAF members transition to life after service.

Reach out to them. Make sure that they know about the programs and benefits that they may be eligible for. And help to build a bridge to their new lives in their new communities.

Thank you.

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