

# Veteran Health

## Reference Guide for Health Care Providers Meeting with Veterans

**Thank you for supporting a former member of Canada's Armed Forces and their family.**

Veterans and their families may have access to a range of medical supports upon leaving the service, either from Veterans Affairs, the Public Service Healthcare Plan or even directly from the military. Their successful transition to civilian life hinges on their transfer from the military's health system to the Canadian civilian healthcare system.

A "Veteran" can range in age from 20 to end of life. They enlist voluntarily and are released either voluntarily or unfortunately in some cases, because of medical conditions that preclude them from continuing to serve. This is a life-changing time for them and their families. This guide is designed to inform you of some of the key issues Veterans and their families experience, so you are more confident and better prepared to support them.

See reverse for additional resources about military service and military health benefits.

### Considerations When Meeting Veteran

- Indicate your commitment to the practitioner-patient confidentially. Privacy is extremely important and making this one of your first steps will help to foster an open dialogue about their current or past medical condition(s).
- A Veteran's spouse can be a wealth of information about conditions the Veteran may not even acknowledge exist. Ensure you have the Veteran's permission to consult and communicate with their spouse.
- In the case of a medically releasing Veteran, often the spouse actively manage the documentation process with the military and Veterans Affairs Canada.
- The military mandates that all serving personnel seek medical attention for injuries sustained during military service, however, doing so may be perceived as having a negative impact on their career progression or signal the end of their military career. Therefore, potential underlying undocumented conditions may exist. These conditions need to be identified and treated, and may lead to a range of health and financial supports from the Government of Canada.

- Military service can be physically laborious. Joint and muscle injuries, but also conditions such as hearing loss can exist after service. To better understand what conditions might exist, it is recommended to ask and understand what activities the Veteran did while in service.
- Mental health conditions resulting from military service can be exacerbated during the transition from military to civilian life. Military service is often referred to as similar to being in a large family and leaving the military can be a cultural and emotional shock. It is important to recognize this emotional impact and encourage/inform the Veteran about civilian supports and medical interventions as appropriate.

### The health and well-being of Veteran's family can be impacted by military service

Veteran's immediate and extended family (parent or chosen family) are also vital in supporting an effective transition from military to civilian life.

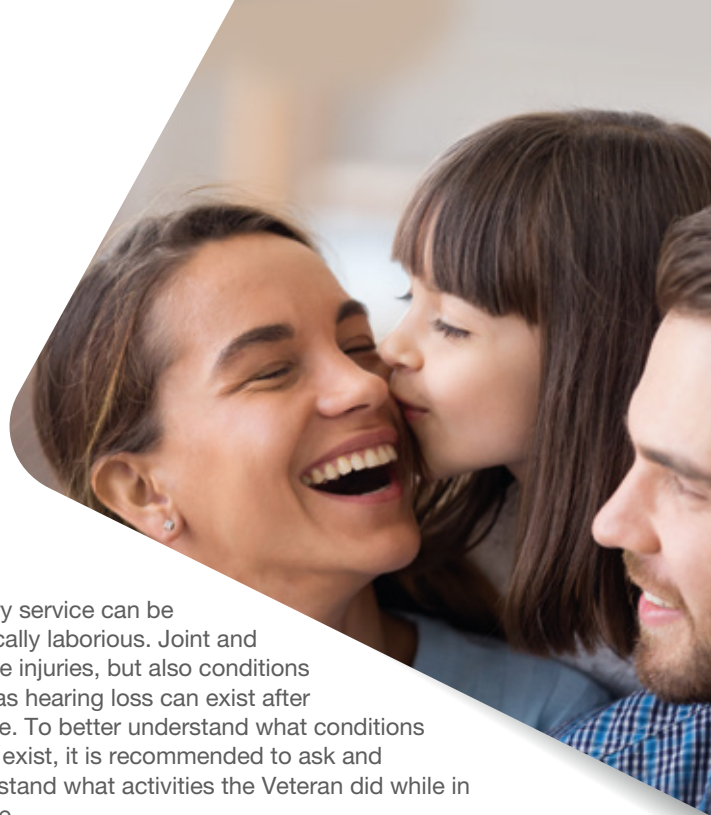
The Veteran's immediate family (spouse, children) will have experienced military service from a different perspective than the Veteran themselves and they can be a significant contributing factor in successful transition.

The family may be eager to leave the military or they may have reservations about civilian life. It may be helpful if the Veteran and their immediate family are served by the same civilian medical practitioner so that the Veteran's overall care can be coordinated with their family.

While extended family (parents or chosen family) may be removed from the day-to-day impacts of the transition, often times they share the same military culture and can be a source of support for the Veteran and their family as well.

More information about available health supports can be found at the Veterans Affairs website:

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/health-support>



## Better understand their unique needs by asking questions about their military service

- When did you release from the CAF?
- Have you recently moved into this community?
- How has your release from the CAF been for you? For your family?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your military service? Were you deployed? How many postings did you have and where to?
- What kind of occupation did you have in the CAF? Did you experience any unusual occupational exposures through service?

## Health questions to ask about possible impacts of military service on a Veteran's health

- How did your military service treat your body?
- Were you lifting heavy items or putting repeated strain on your joints?
- Exposed to loud noises?
- If medically released, ask specifically about the care that was provided to the Veteran in the military
- Are there injuries that you sustained in the military that are undocumented? (Reinforce your commitment to their privacy)
- Do you have your service health record?
- How long was/is the wait to find a primary care provider?
- Have you applied for or are you receiving services or benefits funded through Veterans Affairs Canada?
- Do you need assistance accessing any programs or services through Veterans Affairs Canada?

## Further your own knowledge about military service to better understand and appreciate the experience of the Veteran and their family.

- Am I aware that military service and release may have an impact on the health and well-being of Veterans and their families?
- What are my perceptions, opinions or assumptions towards the CAF or Veterans that may influence the care I provide?
- What is my understanding of physical and mental health, illness and injuries common among Canada's Veteran population?
- Are there resources that I can access/leverage to support the Veteran and the family? (ie Operational Stress Injury Clinic)
- How can I advocate for and support Veterans' access to programs and services?
- How can I use a trauma-informed care approach when engaging with Veterans and their families?
- In what ways can I make my practice more accessible to Veterans and their families (e.g., saving spots on my waitlist for newly released Veterans)?

## After leaving the military, Veterans Affairs Canada is the primary government department responsible for a Veteran's well-being and the administration of eligible Veteran benefit programs.

You may also hear about the Service Income Support Insurance Program (SISIP) which has dual responsibility for supporting medical releasing members of the CAF. Both Veterans Affairs and SISIP provide direct financial support in addition to a range of medical benefits and treatments.

Veterans Affairs specifically provides a range of benefits, resources, and services to assist with mental and physical health, finances, housing, educational and career opportunities, and family/caregiver supports. In order to apply for some benefits or for VAC to fund some health services, Veterans require documentation from primary care providers.

## Additional Support

**Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS)** National peer support network for Canadian Armed Forces members, Veterans and their families who are experiencing an Operational Stress Injury.

<https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Mental-Health/Operational-Stress-Injury-Social-Support.aspx>

**Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Related Medical Conditions**  
<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/health-support/mental-health-and-wellness/understanding-mental-health/centre-of-excellence>

**Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence**  
<https://www.veteranschronicpain.ca/>

**Wounded Warriors Canada** A national mental health service provider utilizing clinical best practices to create an environment of compassion, resiliency, and hope for Canada's Veterans, first responders and their families.  
<https://woundedwarriors.ca/>

**Veterans Transition Network** A national charity that provides mental health services specifically for Veterans across Canada. <https://vtncanada.org/>

**Veterans Emergency Transition Services (VETS Canada)** Federally registered non-profit, volunteer run charity assisting Veterans experiencing homelessness and other difficulties. <https://vetscanada.org/english/about>

**Royal Canadian Legion** Supports for Veterans and their families offered by the Royal Canadian Legion.  
<https://legion.ca/support-for-veterans/adjusting-to-civilian-life>

**Treble Victor** Supporting military leaders in their career transition to civilian life. <https://treblevictor.org/>

## Other useful information

A list of acronyms commonly used in the CAF can be found here:



An overview of the Canadian Armed Forces can be found here:



An overview of the ranks and appointment in the CAF can be found here:

