

# Veteran and Family Health Reference Guide

Leverage full potential of the civilian public health system.

Provincial governments manage the health care system in Canada. It's important to understand the scope and availability of healthcare practitioners where you live and to seek out the care you need.

Civilian healthcare providers are highly skilled professionals. Doctors, nurses and medical practitioners are there to help you and your family. They are bound by doctor/medical professional privilege and must adhere to strict patient confidentiality requirements. They cannot share information about you with the military and Veterans Affairs without your consent. Once you identify a medical practitioner, it is important to be open with them not just about the conditions you are experiencing today, but also information regarding your service history that might contribute to your current health and wellbeing.

You must authorize your medical professional to share information with someone other than you.

Obtaining your medical health record is an important step for substantiating military injuries for Veterans Affairs and SISIP. It is more efficient to obtain this record before leaving the military, but you do have the right to access it after your service as well.

Your military health record may also help you communicate your military service and any related injuries or conditions to your new medical professional. If your military health record is not available at the time of your appointment, that's ok! Be prepared to communicate specifically about your current and any historic medical conditions you are managing.

Your medical professional may be unfamiliar with the range of health and financial benefits that are available to support service-related injuries. Be sure to share information on the benefits you are currently receiving or that you think you may be entitled to. This is important, because your medical professional may base their treatment plan on what benefits are available to you.



**Your civilian healthcare experience will be directly impacted by how much information you are prepared to share with your medical professional(s).**

- Is my new medical professional located near a military base? The answer to this may indicate the level of knowledge and understanding that your medical professional has for military service.
- Am I comfortable to share my medical history with a civilian? It's important to share as much as you feel comfortable with your medical professional. Something you think is completely irrelevant may, in fact, be a contributing factor to your health. Civilian medical professionals are bound by an oath of confidentiality. Be as open and frank as possible to ensure the health care provider can effectively assess your care requirements.
- How long is my appointment? Keep in mind that civilian medical professionals often have busy schedules and appointments may only be 15 minutes long. You may want to consider providing notes on the key items you want to cover or asking for a longer appointment time.
- Do I need access to a specialist? Accessing a specialist will require a referral and treatments can take time, sometimes months or even years depending on the nature of your need. Consider offering to travel to another jurisdiction where the wait time may be shorter. This is particularly relevant for MRIs and other specialized diagnosis treatments.
- Is my spouse or another family member an integral part of my care? If so, be sure to advise your healthcare professional that you authorize them to have access to and provide input on your medical care and treatment.
- Am I prepared to advocate for my own healthcare? In the civilian healthcare system, you are your best advocate. Be clear and concise about your condition(s) and needs.



## General information to share about your military service and release

- 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?
- Do you have your service health record from the Canadian Forces Health Services? Have you been able to share this with your primary care provider?
- Do you have a recent list of medications from the base clinic or your local pharmacy?
- 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 or other organizations?
- How much of your military service are you comfortable sharing with health care providers? Were you deployed? How many postings did you have and where to?

## Things to share about possible impacts of military service on your health

- Did your military occupation require you to put strain on your body?
- Did you acquire any illness or injuries during your service? Was there an injury or experience you had that might have impacted your current health condition(s)?
- Are you experiencing new symptoms from an existing condition that you attribute to your military career? Be sure to specify each so your medical professional can recommend the best course of treatment.

## About Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)

VAC 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. Let your health provider know that specific requirements for entitlement can be found on the VAC website. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/health-support>

## About Canadian Armed Forces

If the care provider would like to learn more about the military, suggest they check out the Canadian Armed Forces website where they can learn more about the Canadian Armed forces including an overview of ranks and appointments and lists of commonly used acronyms. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf.html>

## Additional support

Ask about any community-based programs and services that may meet your needs or those of your family. Some you may be aware of:

**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/>



# Veteran and Family Health Reference Guide

Leverage full potential of the civilian public health system.

Provincial governments manage the health care system in Canada. It's important to understand the scope and availability of healthcare practitioners where you live and to seek out the care you need.

Civilian healthcare providers are highly skilled professionals. Doctors, nurses and medical practitioners are there to help you and your family. They are bound by doctor/medical professional privilege and must adhere to strict patient confidentiality requirements. They cannot share information about you with the military and Veterans Affairs without your consent. Once you identify a medical practitioner, it is important to be open with them not just about the conditions you are experiencing today, but also information regarding your service history that might contribute to your current health and wellbeing.

You must authorize your medical professional to share information with someone other than you.

Obtaining your medical health record is an important step for substantiating military injuries for Veterans Affairs and SISIP. It is more efficient to obtain this record before leaving the military, but you do have the right to access it after your service as well.

Your military health record may also help you communicate your military service and any related injuries or conditions to your new medical professional. If your military health record is not available at the time of your appointment, that's ok! Be prepared to communicate specifically about your current and any historic medical conditions you are managing.

Your medical professional may be unfamiliar with the range of health and financial benefits that are available to support service-related injuries. Be sure to share information on the benefits you are currently receiving or that you think you may be entitled to. This is important, because your medical professional may base their treatment plan on what benefits are available to you.



**Your civilian healthcare experience will be directly impacted by how much information you are prepared to share with your medical professional(s).**

- Is my new medical professional located near a military base? The answer to this may indicate the level of knowledge and understanding that your medical professional has for military service.
- Am I comfortable to share my medical history with a civilian? It's important to share as much as you feel comfortable with your medical professional. Something you think is completely irrelevant may, in fact, be a contributing factor to your health. Civilian medical professionals are bound by an oath of confidentiality. Be as open and frank as possible to ensure the health care provider can effectively assess your care requirements.
- How long is my appointment? Keep in mind that civilian medical professionals often have busy schedules and appointments may only be 15 minutes long. You may want to consider providing notes on the key items you want to cover or asking for a longer appointment time.
- Do I need access to a specialist? Accessing a specialist will require a referral and treatments can take time, sometimes months or even years depending on the nature of your need. Consider offering to travel to another jurisdiction where the wait time may be shorter. This is particularly relevant for MRIs and other specialized diagnosis treatments.
- Is my spouse or another family member an integral part of my care? If so, be sure to advise your healthcare professional that you authorize them to have access to and provide input on your medical care and treatment.
- Am I prepared to advocate for my own healthcare? In the civilian healthcare system, you are your best advocate. Be clear and concise about your condition(s) and needs.

