



Improving Service to Veterans



The Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn delivers remarks to Canadian Forces members during an information session about the New Veterans Charter held at CFB Halifax.

There can be little argument that times are changing and the needs of Canada's Veterans are changing with them. Many will agree Canada's traditional Veterans have had their needs well attended to by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). However, others believe VAC has missed the mark with younger, Canadian Forces or modern-day Veterans.

Five years ago, only 30 percent of the Veterans served by the Department were modern-day Veterans. Today, that number is 45 percent. VAC is working to make improvements to better serve younger Veterans, while continuing to provide quality care for traditional Veterans. A detailed plan is in place to address all aspects of the service

improvements. This plan will help the Department make better use of technology to cut red tape, reduce paperwork and provide self-serve options.

Veterans, advocates and critics from across the country have expressed their opinions about the services and benefits Veterans receive from the Department and VAC is listening. We know Veterans want:

- easier, simple application processes;
- online services to apply for and track claims;
- improved services and programs available for today's younger Veterans; and
- help for Veterans at risk of living in poverty.

VAC is working hard to deliver on these priorities.

As the starting point for many major improvements, last fall the Government announced increased monthly benefits for Canadian Forces Veterans and more flexible financial options for those injured in the line of duty. The changes total two billion dollars and will bring the Department another step closer to improving the quality of life of Canada's Veterans.

Additional financial support was made available for Veterans with ALS, also known as Lou Gherig's Disease, and the time for individuals to submit applications for the Agent Orange *ex gratia* payment was extended and made available to more widows.

In addition, case managers have more authority to make the quick decisions that are critical for an individual's recovery and rehabilitation. VAC now has 270 case managers who are able to provide more personalized service for Veterans during one-on-one meetings.

VAC is also working side by side with DND wherever possible to ensure high standards of service throughout the transition from military to civilian life—with the best help along the way whenever it is needed.

Serving you is Veterans Affairs Canada's number one priority. We won't stop working until we meet the high expectations you have of us.

Help When You Need It

Veterans and their immediate families can access free, short-term, confidential and professional counselling services. If you are experiencing work-related issues, family/marital problems, stress or worry, or any other problem which affects your well-being, call the **24/7** Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service at **1-800-268-7708**. If you are using a TDD machine, please call **1-800-567-5803**. We want to help.





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Minister's Message



Minister Blackburn speaks with a resident of Veterans Memorial Manor in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Throughout January and February, I had the privilege of touring Canada to meet with Veterans, Canadian Forces members, Veterans' organizations and Veterans Affairs Canada staff. I was honoured to travel this beautiful country, from coast to coast, telling people how Veterans Affairs Canada is working to improve service for Veterans.

Since I was appointed Minister of Veterans Affairs a little over a year ago, it has been my personal objective to really listen to what Veterans and those who are impacted by the workings of the Department have to say. I have heard many stories over the past year; some Veterans are concerned about the level and quality of service they have received, while others have nothing but praise for the Department.

I recognize younger Canadian Forces Veterans want to be able to communicate with the Department online and in real-time. I am more than aware some of our policies are cumbersome and red tape is a common obstacle. I know some Veterans need more one-on-one time with VAC staff. And, I understand that making the transition from military to civilian life or coping with severe injuries can be difficult at the best of times and requires a lot of energy.

Veterans should be able to focus all of their energy on rehabilitation and establishing themselves back into the civilian world. No one should be weighed down by time-consuming, frustrating dealings with Veterans Affairs Canada. The process should be quick and simple. You should have easy access to your case manager and you should be satisfied with your service. You are among Canada's bravest citizens and your needs should not only be met, your expectations should be exceeded.

I assure you, this sentiment is felt throughout the Department. I have learned the employees at Veterans Affairs Canada care a great deal about the people they serve. Over the past year, I have gained a better appreciation for their dedication, their commitment and the lengths to which they go for you and your families.

The Department is aware of its shortcomings, and I am pleased to note we are on the road to change. I have taken your experiences and your input

into account and I firmly believe Veterans Affairs has turned a corner in improving service delivery. We are working hard to accelerate turnaround times by reducing red tape and simplifying processes. We are ensuring that your case managers are accessible and that all VAC staff have a better appreciation for the military culture. We are reducing paperwork and implementing more technology, all to better serve *you*.

During my tour, I highlighted some improvements already in place, which include the following:

- The standard turnaround time for decisions on rehabilitation eligibility is now two weeks, an improvement from four weeks;
- Veterans now have less paperwork to complete when applying for the Veterans Independence Program (VIP), which currently helps 107,000 Veterans remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible; and
- Twenty more case managers have been put in place in areas of high demand across the country, to deliver one-on-one service and direct access for Veterans.

I am pleased with the progress made so far, but there is still more that needs to be done. I am counting on you to let us know how we can do better. And, please make no mistake—I promise to continue listening and to respond to what you tell me.

The Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn,
Minister of Veterans Affairs and
Minister of State (Agriculture)

Enhancements to the New Veterans Charter Moving Forward

In the last edition of *Salute!* we told you about the announcement of increased federal government support to enhance financial assistance for seriously injured Veterans. As promised, Bill C-55, *The Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act*, was tabled in the House of Commons by Minister Blackburn on November 17, 2010.

When passed, this Act will:

- increase access to monthly allowances for seriously injured Veterans (up to \$1,631 per month for life as of January 2011);
- introduce an additional \$1,000 monthly supplement to the Permanent Impairment Allowance program to help the most seriously injured or ill Veterans who cannot return to suitable gainful employment; and
- provide options to receive the Disability Award as a lump sum, in annual payments, or in a combination of lump-sum and annual payments.

In addition, regulations will be amended to establish a minimum pre-tax income of

\$40,000 a year for CF Veterans undergoing rehabilitation or who cannot return to suitable gainful employment.

“This Bill, as a first step, makes great strides in improving the New Veterans Charter and encompasses many of the recommendations made by the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs,” said Mrs. Patricia Varga, Dominion President of The Royal Canadian Legion. “The Legion believes that further Charter improvements are necessary, and we look forward to continuing dialogue with Minister Blackburn.”

Since its inception, the New Veterans Charter (NVC) has been known as a “living charter.” Bill C-55 is the first major amendment to the NVC and it addresses many ways to improve service for Canada’s Veterans.

“We are pleased to have had a role in the NVC amendment and that our advice

and recommendations were heard,” said Ray Kokkonen, President of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association.

“Advocating for significant increases in the financial support to our severely wounded Veterans, to allow them to live with dignity, is a top priority for our organization. Accordingly, we are very glad to see this issue being addressed.

“We will continue cooperating closely with Minister Blackburn on other matters related to the Charter to ensure that the ongoing and emerging needs of our Veterans and their families are met,” Mr. Kokkonen said.

Although *The Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act* addressed many issues, there is still more to be done. The Government of Canada has taken a significant first step toward improving service for Canada’s Veterans, and VAC is fully committed to furthering the efforts.

At a Glance: How Does the New Veterans Charter Compare?

	PENSION ACT SYSTEM	NEW VETERANS CHARTER
Financial Support	For pain and suffering	Disability Award ✓
	Monthly income for injured Veterans	Disability Pension ✓
	Additional monthly support for severely injured	Earnings Loss Benefit ✓
	Support for low-income	Exceptional Incapacity Allowance ✓
	Retirement benefits	Attendance Allowance ✓
Rehabilitation for Injured Veterans		Permanent Impairment Allowance (PIA) ✓
		PIA \$1,000 supplement* ✓
		War Veterans Allowance ✓
		Canadian Forces Income Support ✓
		Supplementary Retirement Benefit ✓
		Case management ✓
		Medical treatment ✓
Mental Health Services		Psycho-social rehabilitation ✓
		Career counselling ✓
		Training ✓
		Job-search training ✓
Health Care		Job placement services ✓
		Operational stress injury (OSI) clinics ✓
		Peer support ✓
		24/7 help line ✓
Support for New Non-Injured Veterans		Pastoral outreach ✓
		Treatment benefits for injury/illness ✓
		Veterans Independence Program ✓
Support for Families		Long-term care ✓
		Access to group health insurance ✓
		Career counselling ✓
		Job-search training ✓
		Job placement services ✓
		Peer support ✓
		Access to OSI clinics ✓
		Medical rehabilitation ✓
		Psycho-social rehabilitation ✓
		Career counselling ✓
		Training ✓
	Job-search training ✓	
	Job placement services ✓	
	Death Benefit ✓	
	Monthly income ✓	
	Retirement benefit ✓	
	Educational grants for children ✓	
	Access to group health insurance ✓	

*Pending Parliament's approval of Bill C-55.

Canadian Youth Will Be a Big Part of Vimy Ridge 95th Anniversary



All Canadians continue to benefit from the many sacrifices made by those who have served our country, and their contribution during the Great War forms a part of Canadian heritage that must not, and will not be forgotten.

April 2012 marks the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The Government of Canada plans to mark the anniversary in a significant way, both at home and overseas. Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is pleased to learn of the many youth groups and individuals who are making their own plans to mark this important date in Canada's history.

Getting youth actively involved in remembrance is essential. VAC is working with a number of educators, educational

tour companies and other school and youth groups as they plan their commemorative journeys to the battlefields of Europe. EF Educational Tours, in partnership with the Vimy Foundation, has recently announced tours to France to mark the anniversary. Explorica, another company that works with schools, has also developed a number of anniversary tours to Vimy to attend the commemorative ceremony on April 9, 2012, at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France.

The Canadian National Vimy Memorial is Canada's most impressive overseas memorial. The memorial, which overlooks the Douai Plain from the highest point of Vimy Ridge, is an inspiring tribute to all who served Canada in battle during the First World War—particularly to those who gave their

lives. Carved on the walls of the monument are the names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers who were killed in France. Youth who visit the memorial are not only struck by its unique beauty, but are touched by the staggering loss of young Canadian lives. These youth become important bearers of the torch of remembrance.

As always, Government of Canada ceremonies are open to the public, and all Canadians are encouraged to participate. VAC works to provide all visitors, including school and youth groups, an unforgettable experience that is both educational and memorable.

As the anniversary date approaches, more information will be posted on the VAC Web site at veterans.gc.ca.

Honouring Excellence



The Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), joined Canadian Football League Commissioner Mark Cohon (right) to present the Jake Gaudaur Veterans' Trophy, a new award which recognizes a CFL player who best demonstrates the attributes of Canada's Veterans. The first recipient of the award was Saskatchewan Roughrider Mike McCullough (center). The award was presented at the Kipnes Centre for Veterans in Edmonton, Alberta.

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Important Changes to Agent Orange *Ex Gratia* Payment

Minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn has announced the Government of Canada is extending the deadline for applications for the Agent Orange *ex gratia* payment to June 30, 2011. He also announced changes to some of the eligibility criteria.

“We estimate that these changes will allow approximately 1,140 more people to receive the *ex gratia* payment, for a total of approximately \$24 million dollars,” said Minister Blackburn.

The original Agent Orange *ex gratia* payment, announced in September 2007, was a one-time, tax-free *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000 related to the testing of unregistered U.S. military herbicides, including Agent Orange, at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick. This

testing occurred during the summers of 1966 and 1967. Under the original announcement, 3,137 applicants received the payment, for a total payout of \$62.7 million.

Changes to eligibility criteria include the following:

- Applicants have until June 30, 2011 to obtain a relevant medical diagnosis.
- Applicants no longer have to prove a medical diagnosis was in progress before February 6, 2006.
- The requirement for applicants to have been alive on February 6, 2006 has been removed. This will allow more primary caregivers, including widows and widowers, to apply on behalf of a loved one who died before the *ex gratia* payment came into place.

To qualify for the Agent Orange *ex gratia* payment, individuals must have:

- worked or lived, trained or had been posted to within five kilometres of CFB Gagetown when Agent Orange was tested in 1966 and 1967,

AND

- be diagnosed with a medical condition listed in the U.S. National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine Update 2004.

For more information on eligibility criteria and how to apply:

- visit veterans.gc.ca
- or call 1-866-522-2122

The new deadline for applications is **June 30, 2011.**

Study Into Causes of Death Among Military Personnel Underway

The Department of National Defence is joining with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and Statistics Canada to conduct a Canadian Forces Cancer and Mortality Study. The goal of this study is to examine the causes of death among serving Canadian Forces (CF) members and Veterans.

The study will match the names of CF members and Veterans who have enrolled in the CF since 1972 with information from Statistics Canada's mortality and cancer databases. Results from the study will help to show whether those who have served in the military have an increased or decreased risk of poor health in comparison to the general population.

Study findings will be used to improve or develop, where necessary, policies or programs to protect the health of CF members and provide services to Veterans.

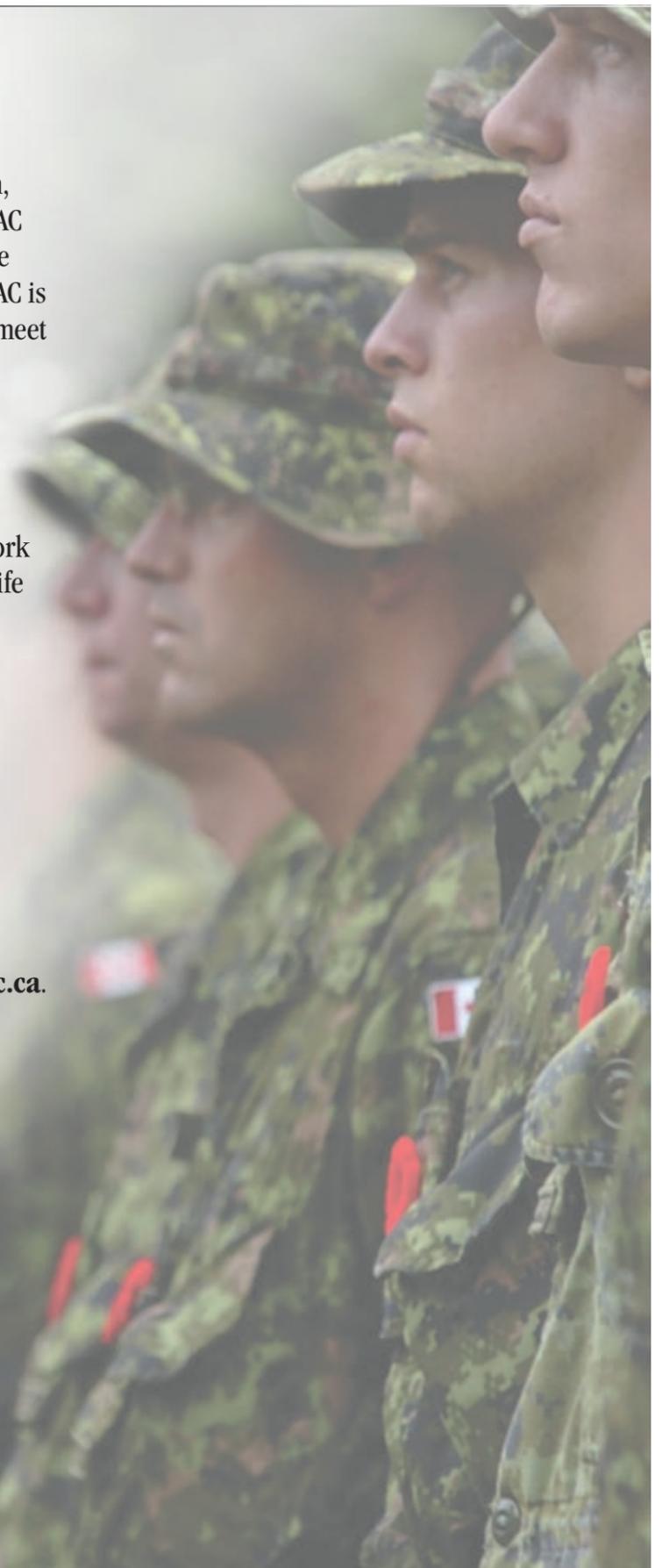
This study is important for VAC because it will collect cause-of-death information

from the general Veteran population, including both Veterans served by VAC and those not presently served by the Department, and will help ensure VAC is delivering services to Veterans that meet their needs.

This study is the first of its kind in Canada, and will provide important information for future research projects. It also complements the work currently underway through VAC's Life After Service Studies program of research.

The first results from the study will be available in the next few months. Additional findings are expected to follow over the next year.

For more information, please contact VAC at:
Research-Recherche@vac-acc.gc.ca.



Medical Release: A Shared Journey to Civilian Life

Kevin was an infantryman for 10 years when he suffered a serious leg injury. Eventually, Kevin learned he no longer met *Universality of Service* requirements and would be medically released. The news frightened him and set him on a journey he wasn't prepared for—coping with an injury while learning to adapt to civilian life.

You may relate personally to Kevin's situation or know someone who does. Keep reading to find out how Kevin and others like him are supported on their journey to recovery and their successful transition to civilian life with the support of the Canadian Forces (CF), Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), and the Service Income Security Insurance Plan Financial Services (SISIP FS).

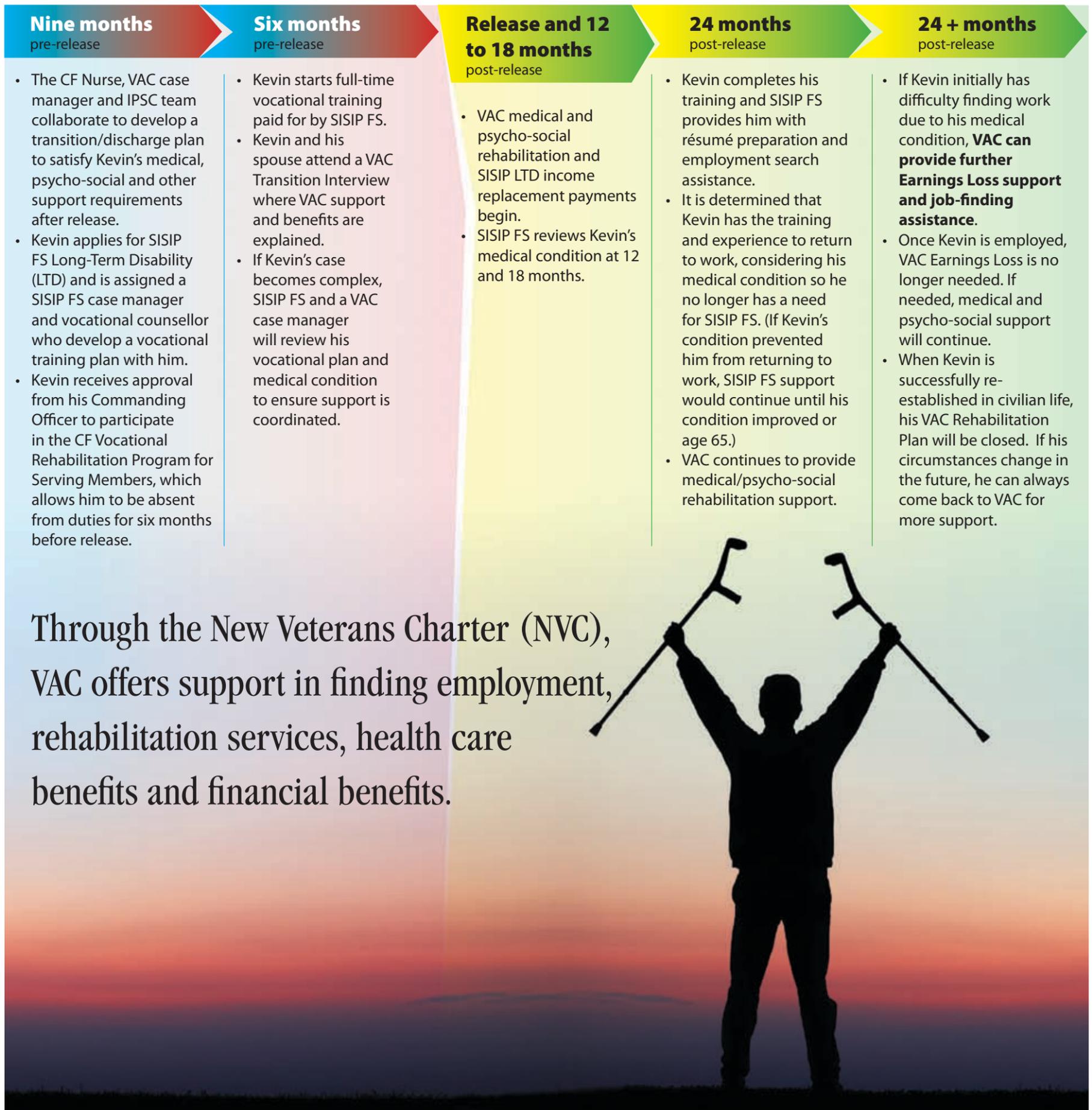
From the moment Kevin injured his leg, the CF provided him with comprehensive health care, rehabilitation and support. After three months of medical treatment to stabilize his leg injury, he was assigned a CF nurse case manager, posted to the Joint Personnel Support Unit and assigned to an integrated personnel support centre (IPSC). After another year of treatment and rehabilitation, Kevin was awarded a permanent medical category. He then applied for and received a disability award from VAC.

Support for Kevin doesn't end here. Now that he is medically released, SISIP FS and VAC will focus their efforts on providing the support needed to help Kevin successfully transition to civilian life. While SISIP FS will

provide Kevin with vocational rehabilitation and a long-term disability benefit, VAC can help provide additional rehabilitation services (medical and psycho-social, for example), additional financial benefits (Earnings Loss, for example), support finding a job and health care benefits, depending on his needs.

Read the table below to find out about some of the supports Kevin can expect from the CF, VAC and SISIP FS.

This is a fictional case scenario to illustrate how CF, VAC and SISIP FS work together to provide the support needed to medically releasing members. For more information, please visit: www.sisip.com and veterans.gc.ca.



VAC Has a New National Medical Officer



Brig.-Gen. Hilary Jaeger tries out the passenger compartment of an armoured ambulance while talking with a Swedish military paramedic during a visit with the Provincial Reconstruction Team led by the Sweden in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan.

Veterans Affairs Canada has a new National Medical Officer, Brig.-Gen. Hilary Jaeger. Brigadier-General Jaeger brings with her an impressive resume as she joins the Department from the Canadian Forces (CF) for a 22-month assignment.

As the National Medical Officer for VAC, Brigadier-General Jaeger is functionally responsible for all health professionals within the Department and she will play a major part in redefining their role and structure, all to better serve Canada's Veterans.

One way the Department intends to improve service to younger CF Veterans is by increasing the understanding of military culture. With her vast experience in the CF, Brigadier-General Jaeger will play a key role in familiarizing VAC staff with military culture while building upon and strengthening the Department's relationship with the CF health professional community.

Brigadier-General Jaeger brings a wealth of experience in operational medicine, field unit command and senior staff roles, culminating in five years as the Canadian Forces surgeon general and two years as director general of Health Services. Throughout her military career, Brigadier-General Jaeger has been involved with strategic planning, re-engineering projects and implementing cultural change. These experiences lay an impressive groundwork for her new role at VAC.

"I am very excited to be joining VAC at such a critical point for the Department," she said. "I am impressed by the depth of commitment of everyone I have met so far, and I am confident that this commitment will enable VAC to make the changes necessary to better meet the evolving needs of Canada's Veterans."

In 1995, she was part of a hand-picked team, tasked with reengineering the Canadian Forces Medical Service. Four years later, she was assigned to the Tiger Team, which conducted the initial strategic planning for the CF transformation effort known as Rx2000—one of the most comprehensive medical reform projects in Canadian military history. This drastic change to the military health care system had an effect on almost every element of health services, from clinical care to administration.

Brigadier-General Jaeger is eager to help the Department on the road to improving service for Canada's Veterans. Drawing from her experience and medical knowledge, she will help VAC redefine and restructure its health services. This is yet another piece to the puzzle that will ensure Canada's Veterans receive the services and benefits they deserve, where and when they need them.

Naval Fund Helps Those In Need

Since it began, the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF) has helped countless families relieve the distress caused by illness, accident or other misfortunes by providing loans or grants to those in need of financial assistance.

Those eligible for assistance include:

- former members of the Naval Forces of Canada;
- serving and former members of the Canadian Forces who served in Maritime Command since February 1, 1968;

- Merchant Navy War Veterans; and
- dependents of any of the above.

The fund has helped people buy such necessities as clothing and food, or paid for medical, dental, optical, surgical and prosthetic services. It also provides assistance for home repairs, funeral costs or to replace belongings destroyed by fire. In addition, a bursary program for dependent children attending college, university or a vocational institution may be available if other options such as government loans have been exhausted.

The fund is maintained by donations from serving and ex-service personnel, civilian supporters and naval organizations, as well as investments. Eligibility for a loan or grant through the fund is determined on an individual basis.

For further information, please visit the RCNBF Web site www.rcnbf.ca or contact them at:

613 996-5087

1-888-557-8777

E-mail: rcnbf@sympatico.ca

VAC Proud to Salute Canada's Servicewomen



Russell Mills, Chair of the National Capital Commission, Marie Lemay, Chief Executive Officer of the National Capital Commission, The Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), Lieutenant-General André Deschamps, CD, Chief of the Air Staff, and Chief Warrant Officer Miles Barham illuminate an ice sculpture honouring women who have served, and are serving in the Canadian Forces.

Each year, Veterans Affairs Canada works with the National Capital Commission to sponsor an ice sculpture at Ottawa's Winterlude. This year's sculpture honoured women serving in the Canadian Forces—past, present and future.

At a special ceremony in Confederation Park on February 10, 2011, the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), along with Lieutenant-General André Deschamps, Chief of the Air Staff, Canadian Forces, illuminated an ice sculpture recreating the Nursing Sisters Memorial. The memorial is located in the Hall of Honour on Parliament Hill. The world-renowned ice artists who created the sculpture also carved three female figures representing roles performed by women in today's military.

The first Canadian women to see military service were Nursing Sisters who helped tend to the medical needs of soldiers serving in the Northwest Rebellion (1885) and in the South African War (1899–1902). The First World War (1914–1918) saw more than 3,100 nurses volunteer for service in the Canadian Army Medical Corps. The majority served overseas, sometimes within range of enemy attack—45 of these brave women died.

The role of women in the military expanded greatly in the Second World War (1939–1945). Women returned to their roles as nurses,

but all three branches of the military also opened their doors wider with the formation of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, the Royal Canadian Air Force - Women's Division and the Canadian Women's Army Corps. More than 45,000 women volunteered to fill new roles as clerks, cooks, mechanics, wireless operators, radar plotters, drivers, parachute riggers and more.

While the women's services were disbanded following the war, some women would serve in the following decades before the Canadian Forces opened its doors to females for good in the 1960s. The barriers continued to fall in the following decades and today women are generals, deploy on combat missions, captain ships and command flying squadrons — their career paths are as open as those of men. Sadly, this service can come at a great price. Captain Nicola Goddard became the first Canadian woman to die in combat duty when she was killed while serving as an artillery observer during a battle in Afghanistan in 2006.

As women's roles in society have evolved over the past century, so too have their roles in the military. Veterans Affairs Canada is proud to salute the service of Canadian women in uniform who have helped protect peace and freedom and shape the country we have today.

How to Reach Us

Veterans Affairs Canada Web site:
www.vac-acc.gc.ca
 Veterans Affairs Canada E-mail:
information@vac-acc.gc.ca

Do you need information on Services and Benefits?

Note: When you call us, please have your VAC client number ready, if you have one.
 Phone: 1-866-522-2122 (English)
 Phone: 1-866-522-2022 (French)
 United States:
 Phone: 1-888-996-2242
 United Kingdom, Germany, France, or Belgium:
 Phone: 00-800-996-22421
 Any other country:
 Phone: 613-996-2242

Do you need information on disability benefit decisions or how to request a review or appeal?

Call the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA) at: 1-877-228-2250

Do you need information on remembrance programming?

Phone: 1-866-522-2122 (English)
 Phone: 1-866-522-2022 (French)
 Phone: 1-800-465-7735 (Hearing Impaired)

Veterans Review and Appeal Board

P.O. Box 9900
 Charlottetown PE C1A 8V7
 Phone: 1-800-450-8006
 Outside Canada
 Phone: 0-902-566-8751
 Web site: www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca

Funeral and Burial Information

Last Post Fund
 Phone: 1-800-465-7113
 Web site: www.lastpostfund.ca

VAC Assistance Line

Confidential, professional counselling 24/7
 1-800-268-7708

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman

Mailing Address:
 Veterans Ombudsman
 P.O. Box 18 Stn B
 Ottawa, ON K1P 6C3
 1-877-330-4343
 Outside Canada:
 1-902-626-2919
 Fax Number:
 1-902-566-7582
 Web site:
www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca

To submit a complaint, go to:
www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/complaint/introduction-eng.cfm

To find out about an existing complaint, or to request or share Information, e-mail:
info@ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca