

INDIGENOUS VETERANS

- Our Government is committed to supporting and recognizing our Indigenous Veterans.
- Our commitment is demonstrated through involvement with the established permanent bilateral mechanisms with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to identify joint priorities, co-develop policy and monitor progress.
- Making sure that Indigenous Veterans are getting the services they need is a priority as we continue on our path of reconciliation.
 - On February 8, 2019, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs tabled its report, “Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition” which presented 12 recommendations.
 - Our Government’s response agreed with the spirit and intent of the Report’s 12 recommendations and we continue to advance work toward better recognition of Indigenous Veterans while ensuring they get the services they need.
- We are firmly committed to increasing awareness of our programs and services among Indigenous Veterans and to recognizing their military achievements.
- The contribution and sacrifice of all Indigenous Veterans will not be forgotten.

BACKGROUND – INDIGENOUS VETERANS

Canada's Indigenous Peoples - First Nations, Métis and Inuit - have a proud tradition of military service. While exact numbers are difficult to determine, the rate of Indigenous participation in Canada's military has been significant. It is estimated that as many as 12,000 Indigenous people from Canada served in the two world wars, with at least 500 of them sadly losing their lives.

On December 15, 2016, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of permanent bilateral mechanisms (PBM) with the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the four Inuit Nunangat Regions, and the Métis National Council in order to establish joint priorities and monitor progress.

Recently on September 10, 2019, federal Minister of Veterans Affairs, Minister MacAulay issued a statement to recognize the pre-and post Second World War experiences of Métis Veterans.

"We regret that our country has taken three-quarters of a century to address the concerns of Métis Veterans who joined Canada's call to arms to enter the Second World War. They left this country not knowing the enemy they would face, nor the countries and people they were to defend. They were, nonetheless, instrumental in Canada's action to protect basic rights and freedoms around the globe."

"Addressing these longstanding concerns is a significant step forward in the process of reconciliation with the Métis people. When the Government of Canada and the Métis Nation signed the *Canada-Métis Nation Accord* in April 2017, we agreed that Métis Veterans were a priority area that needed to be addressed."

"To this end, I am pleased that the Government of Canada has allocated \$30 million to recognize Métis Veterans of the Second World War for their pre- and post-war experiences and to support commemorative initiatives that promote awareness and appreciation of Métis Veterans' sacrifices and contributions among the Métis People as well as the general Canadian public."

Honouring Service:

Commemoration of Indigenous Veterans is achieved through various components of Veterans Affairs Canada's *Canada Remembers Program*, including memorials, Heroes Remember, the Canadian Virtual War Memorial and learning opportunities. The *Canada Remembers Program* promotes remembrance of Canada's Indigenous Veterans' achievements and sacrifices and seeks appropriate opportunities to create awareness of their military contributions.

The *Books of Remembrance*, which are kept on Parliament Hill, commemorate the lives of more than 118,000 Canadians including Indigenous servicemen and women who, since Confederation, have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our country in uniform. Other ways in which Veterans Affairs Canada recognizes the contributions and sacrifices of Indigenous Veterans include an Indigenous Veterans web feature, which highlights their impressive contributions to Canadian military efforts over the years,

historical fact sheets and booklets, and articles in Veterans Affairs Canada's Veterans' Week learning material.

Interviews with Indigenous Veterans can be found on Veterans Affairs Canada's *Heroes Remember* web feature, which offers a unique opportunity for Canadians of all ages to experience history through the eyes of those who lived it. Veterans Affairs Canada's social media channels also include entries that touch on Indigenous Veterans' military accomplishments. In addition, the Department periodically organizes commemorative events in Canada and overseas to mark significant military anniversaries. Indigenous Veterans have been part of these special tributes. For example, Indigenous Veterans have been part of the official Government of Canada delegations that traveled overseas for the 100th anniversaries of the Battle of Passchendaele and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, as well as the 75th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid and, most recently, the 75th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy.

In Canada, Indigenous Veterans participate in commemorative ceremonies held throughout the year, and Indigenous youth also participate to demonstrate their commitment to carry the torch of remembrance for future generations.

Through its funding programs, the Department has supported many commemorative projects and memorials dedicated to our Indigenous Veterans and fallen heroes.

Indigenous peoples from every region of Canada have a strong tradition of service, and their courage and contributions are a source of pride to their families, communities and all Canadians.

Serving Indigenous Veterans:

The Government of Canada is committed to meeting the needs of Indigenous Veterans, regardless of where they live. Veterans Affairs Canada remains committed to offering high quality services to all Veterans regardless of where they live in Canada, including those living in remote and northern communities. Through its ongoing Case Management service offering, Veterans Affairs Canada service teams provide services to all parts of Canada including rural and remote communities. Veterans living in those communities or on reserve can also receive in person home visits on an as needed basis.

Veterans and their families can contact the Veterans Affairs Canada call centre as well as the 24 hour assistance service line. Information on all of Veterans Affairs Canada's programs and services is available on Veterans Affairs Canada's website through which Veterans can access the Benefits Navigator. Veterans who prefer interacting online can use *My Veterans Affairs Canada Account* to send front-line staff secure messages or to apply for benefits and track the processing of their applications.

When visiting communities, Veterans Affairs Canada service teams work with community partners, service providers, the Canadian Armed Forces (including Canadian Rangers) and Service Canada to raise awareness of Veterans Affairs Canada's programs and benefits while ensuring they are delivered in a culturally-appropriate manner.

**Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled:
“Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition”:**

On February 8, 2019, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs tabled its report, *“Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition”*. A formal Government Response was required within 120 days. The Government response was tabled in Parliament on May 30, 2019.

The Report presents 12 recommendations. The majority of the recommendations (7 of 12) are directed solely at Veterans Affairs Canada with 5 implicating other Government Departments (Canadian Armed Forces/Department of National Defence; Service Canada; Territorial governments; United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and Indigenous Services Canada).

In its report, several topics were explored: 1) support offered to Indigenous Veterans during the transition process, 2) services offered to Indigenous Veterans by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and partners, 3) response to the specific needs of Indigenous Veterans living in remote areas, 4) the treatment of Indigenous Veterans who served in the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War, (5) support for Veterans who served with the Canadian Rangers, (6) engagement of Indigenous Veterans organizations and (7) commemoration.

In its response, the Government agreed with the spirit and intent of all recommendations and is now working to understand and better address the needs of Indigenous Veterans.