

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS – \*redacted\***

- \*redacted\*
- The focus of providing mental health support to a family member is always based on the best interest and the well-being of the Veteran.
- Ensuring the health and well-being of a Veteran remains our top priority.
- \*redacted\*
- Requests for mental health services for family members are being reviewed by Veterans Affairs Canada\* before making a decision in extenuating circumstances. \*redacted\*
- \*redacted\*

(\*an Area Director or above)

\*redacted\*

### **Case in media specific background:**

- Veterans Affairs Canada has extended its mental health services to include family members; however, it is always done in the best interest and well-being of the Veteran.
- Care is provided to family members and spouses when Veterans Affairs Canada knows it is to the benefit of the well-being of the Veteran.
- In situations where there are unusual circumstances, decisions are made on a case by case basis.
- Achieving a positive outcome can be compromised if the Veteran is treated in isolation without addressing the effects that the mental health condition has on the family, or the effects that the family dynamic has on the patient's own mental health condition.

### **General Background:**

- When a man or woman serves in the Canadian armed forces or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, their whole family serves with them. Veterans Affairs Canada acknowledges that a Veteran may only be able to restore his or her ability to function with the support of their family. In all cases, VAC approved services are intended to address the Veteran's mental health condition. A Veteran's family may be included in mental health services when doing so is required to achieve positive outcomes for the Veteran as established in the Veteran's rehabilitation plan.
- Family members may have mental health needs that are unrelated to the mental health problem for which the Veteran client is receiving rehabilitation services or treatment. These needs will not be covered by Veterans Affairs Canada; however information about local/provincial resources is provided to them.
- Other ways Veterans Affairs Canada can provide support and care for family members:
  - Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service, a 24/7 toll free number that any veteran or family member can call to speak with a mental health professional, who will work to match them up with a counsellor in the local community. In such a case, the decision to provide services is made by the mental health professional.
  - The Department funds a network of 11 Operational Stress Injury clinics which provide mental health support and services to Veterans and their families when the Veteran has an operational stress injury. If it looks like treating family member(s) would help progress the treatment of the Veteran, a decision would then be made to do so. Services are based on current best

practices and are customized to meet the individual's needs. The team also works closely with health care providers or organizations in the community to help ensure follow-up is available when needed. Family members may also receive or participate in some of the services provided through the clinic. A total of 238 family members received treatment/mental health support.

- \*redacted\*
- Since then, Mr. O'Regan reinforced the point that where services are provided by another jurisdiction, Veterans Affairs Canada will not duplicate those services and Mr. O'Regan defended the prerogative to provide Veterans with the mental health care they need, and when and where they need it.

### **Review of Mental Health Policy**

The Department is reviewing its Mental Health Policy, and is working with the Department of Justice to determine the extent to which family members can participate in a Veteran's rehabilitation and treatment plan.