

## Communications Guidelines: Key Messages for New Minister

- It is an honour to be appointed the Minister of Veterans Affairs and I look forward to serving those who have served, and those who continue to serve our country so admirably.
- It is a privilege to be named to this post at such a significant time of year...during a month where we all take pause to remember and recognize all who serve.
- Earlier this month we marked Veterans' Week—a time to honour those who served Canada, past and present, in times of war, military conflict and peace. As an important part of the Department's mandate, as Minister, I will be honoured to encourage Canadians to recognize and pay our respects to Veterans year-round.
- Ensuring the overall health, well-being, and financial security of Veterans and their families is what Veterans Affairs Canada strives to do every day. I look forward to the work ahead and to ensuring that Veterans receive the services they need.
- For Veterans and their families, we offer a number of programs and services that are designed to address both the opportunities and challenges that may arise after their transition into post-service life.

### If pressed on any one issue:

- I intend to meet with Veterans, stakeholders and staff to better understand the dynamics and opportunities we have in supporting Veteran well-being.

### Anecdote, if needed:

Quote by Martha Heller, expert in CIOs in the New Era

- *"If you want to have an impact in your organization, have a point of view that sometimes challenges the status quo but do the work required to make the point of view an informed one." ...*
- So I intend to get myself informed quickly!

## **Key Messages: Top Issues**

### **Disability Benefit Wait Times (Backlog)**

Despite hiring more staff and improving the application process, intake of disability benefit applications continues to exceed capacity. As of 31 March 2019, there were 40,305 pending applications (note: 13,564 waiting for additional information and 26,741 waiting for a decision).

- More and more Veterans are coming forward to get the help they need.
- Since 2015, Veterans Affairs Canada has seen an increase of more than 90% in first-time applications for disability benefits.
- The Department is making progress to improve the service delivery experience for Veterans, decrease wait times and make things easier for Veterans and their families.

### **Veterans' Week / Italian Campaign**

Every November 5th to the 11th, we remember the sacrifice and contribution of those who served and continue to serve. Veterans' Week culminates with Remembrance Day commemorative ceremonies across the country on November 11.

- This year's theme was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Campaign—one of many key milestones in the lead up to the end of the Second World War.
- During Veterans' Week, events took place across Canada and overseas. Many thousands of Canadians took part in these events, either directly or virtually, to show they remember.

### **Veterans' Week Advertising**

- Updated creative: Our Freedom
- \$2M advertising campaign, November 1-11
- Paid media mix: TV, online, social media, Facebook/Instagram/Snapchat/Twitter/Spotify/YouTube
- Veterans' Week Remembrance hub page on [veterans.gc.ca](http://veterans.gc.ca)

**\*redacted\***

### **Programs and Services Highlights: Pension for Life**

Introduced on 1 April 2019, Pension for Life is a combination of benefits that provide recognition, income support and stability to members and Veterans who experience a service-related illness or injury.

- This new suite of benefits will empower Veterans and CAF members living with a service-related injury and/or illness to determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families.
- Pension for Life is a comprehensive package that provides compensation for pain and suffering and income replacement benefits.
- Pension for life represents an additional investment of close to \$3.6 billion to support Canada's Veterans. When combined with well-being programs already announced in previous budgets, the Government of Canada's investments since 2016 add up to nearly \$10 billion.
- These investments deliver what Veterans have asked for: a monthly pension for life, enhanced supports and a simpler system, and a more positive experience while helping Veterans and their families as they transition to life after service.

### **Long Term Care**

- Our Government is and continues to be committed to supporting Canada's Veterans and their families.
- We place the highest priority on making sure Veterans have the support they need, when they need it - and that includes access to long-term care.
- We support Veterans and their long term care needs in over 1,200 provincially and privately owned and operated facilities across the country.
- We work with provincial authorities, Veterans and their families to explore all options available for re-location in nursing homes and long-term care facilities when possible.
- Since becoming aware of the challenges faced by some Veterans in accessing long term care, Veterans Affairs Canada has worked closely with provinces, health authorities and facilities to find solutions that ensure the well-being of Veterans.
- We are committed to ensuring that Veterans receive the respect, support, and care they deserve.
- Since 2016, investments have totaled \$10 billion for Veteran programs and services.

**\*redacted\***

Mefloquine is an anti-malaria medication that has been used by the CAF since the early 1990s.

- Veterans who believe they have a disability related to their military service are encouraged to apply to Veterans Affairs Canada for assistance.
- Veterans Affairs Canada does not diagnose. The Veteran's health care practitioner is responsible for providing a diagnosis. The Department processes claims and adjudicates based on recognized diagnoses and the link to service.
- It is also important to note that Veterans Affairs Canada does not regulate or prescribe mefloquine. Similar to any treatment or prescription reimbursed by the Department, VAC does not have the authority to direct health care professionals to authorize specific treatments.

**\*redacted\***

Some Veterans may have experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military. These kinds of experiences can affect Veterans' mental and physical health, even many years later. Each and every Veteran who feels that they may have a service-related illness or injury, sexually related or not, is encouraged to reach out to VAC so that their needs can be discussed and support provided wherever possible.

- We are committed to ensuring eligible Veterans and their families have access to the support they need, when they need it.
- Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to updating its policies to ensure Veterans receive the support they require, in a compassionate and respectful way.
- The Government of Canada is committed to providing a work environment in which all employees are treated with respect and dignity, free of discrimination and bias.
- As this matter is presently before the court, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

**\*redacted\***

In the early 2000's, a change to the personal tax exemptions under the Income Tax Act was not incorporated in Veterans Affairs Canada's annual adjustment calculations until January 2011. Approximately 270,000 Veterans, survivors and members of the RCMP who received Veterans Affairs Canada's Disability Pension payments from 2003 to 2010 are impacted and will receive a retroactive payment. The estimated value of the error is approximately \$165 million.

- We thank the Ombudsman and his staff for bringing this important matter to our attention.
- We are not waiting for the outcome of court proceedings to resolve this matter. As soon as the Ombudsman brought it to our attention, we started making plans to secure the resources needed to compensate those affected.
- We are working hard to get this money into the hands of those affected.