

## CANADA VOTES 2025: VETERAN WELL-BEING

Transitioning from military to civilian life can be challenging for veterans with illness, injury or trauma, and many have lost trust in the military and government systems that should support them. Veterans need reliable, tailored support focused on improving equitable outcomes, including access to health care, housing, financial security and meaningful work. This must be grounded in dignity, respect and recognition. Every member's experience in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and RCMP are not the same, so their care and support should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. While progress has been made, more is needed, including strong leadership from a dedicated minister for veterans' affairs.

That's why a plan for veteran well-being is critical – and that's why Federal Retirees is calling for vision and action from our next federal government to support economic security and quality of life for all veterans.

### Focusing on veteran health and well-being

- Transitioning from military to civilian life is challenging for veterans, especially those with illness, injuries or trauma. Many veterans have lost faith in the military and government, making it essential to rebuild trust. That requires strong, reliable support systems for a smooth release from service, including health care.
- Every member's experience in the CAF and RCMP are not the same, so their care and support should not be a one-size-fits-all approach.
- The 2024 budget included \$9.3 million investment over five years for telemedicine for veterans. In a study of telehealth experiences of Canadian veterans, participants reported that it was impractical, particularly when physical testing or examination was required.
- Veterans need timely, appropriate care. The next federal government must ensure physicians have the tools and resources needed to deliver effective, appropriate veteran care.

### An independent consultation and plan

- In the nearly two decades since the New Veterans Charter, legislative change and new benefits have added layers of rules, complexity and confusion when it comes to veteran benefits.
- In 2023-2024, 32 per cent of disability benefits first applications to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) were not completed within the department's service standard. Although some improvements have been seen, wait times for disability benefits decisions are the number one complaint the Office of the Veterans Ombud receives.
- As defense spending and military capacity grow, action must be taken now to ensure a cohesive, holistic approach to supports for veterans and their families, spanning military careers from basic training to post-release.
- The Veterans Ombud has called for a national conversation to improve outcomes for veterans, including reducing VAC wait times for disability pension decisions.

### CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION

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### Equity for women veterans

- The landmark report *Invisible No More: The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans* (June 2024) by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) has 42 recommendations across 156 pages, covering unmet needs in research, medical and health care, recognition and commemoration, and identifies ways to remove barriers to accessing services and supports.
- The next federal government must commit to achieving equitable outcomes for all veterans by acting on this report with funding and a clear plan that ensures transparency, accountability, and collaboration across sectors and within government.

### Addressing homelessness

- Veterans are two to three times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population, with an estimated 2,400 to 10,000 unhoused veterans in Canada.
- A study by McGill University's Max Bell School of Public Policy took an exhaustive look at the policies and programs needed to meaningfully reduce veteran homelessness and advance adequate housing for veterans in Canada. The study found that veteran-serving organizations are stretched thin, and that the issue is compounded by unclear funding prioritization, limited prevention efforts and insufficient investment in data.
- Women veterans represent 30 per cent of unhoused or housing insecure veterans, and they experience this differently than men as they are more likely to have dependents, to have experienced intimate partner violence as well as military sexual trauma. Most services are designed for single men and fail to meet the needs of women and gender-diverse individuals.

### Questions to candidates

- 1) **Equitable outcomes for all veterans:** How will your party address the recommendations from the ACVA report, *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*?
  - Ideal response:  
ACVA's report on women veterans cannot be set on a shelf and forgotten. We would implement recommendations through a dedicated action plan with clear goals, funding and accountability across departments. We would also prioritize inclusive, gender-informed policies to improve health-care, services, recognition and research, to support veterans from basic training to post-release.
- 2) **A new way forward for veterans:** It's been nearly 20 years since the New Veterans Charter was introduced. How will your party ensure Canada meets its obligations to veterans over the coming decades?
  - Ideal response:  
It is time to review how Canada serves and supports veterans. We would initiate a national conversation to listen veterans and their families, so we can understand how best to serve them, improve outcomes with them and ensure we move in the right direction for all veterans.

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- 3) **Disability pension backlog:** How will your party continue the work done to address the backlog of decisions for veterans' disability benefit applications?
- Ideal response:  
To build on the work done so far, we would invest in long-term staffing and set goals to identify process streamlining and improve case management to address the backlog. To build trust, we would ensure transparency and regular progress updates, as well as engagement with veterans to ensure the system is fully meeting their needs, including in timeliness.
- 4) **Veteran homelessness:** How will your party address veterans' homelessness?
- Ideal response:  
Investments in prevention, tailored support and funding for housing and services would be made. The unique needs of women and gender-diverse veterans would be recognized so that solutions are inclusive and informed by research and data

**ABOUT FEDERAL RETIREES** The National Association of Federal Retirees (Federal Retirees) is the largest national advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors. With more than 170,000 members from coast to coast to coast, Federal Retirees has advocated for improvements to the financial security, health and well-being of our members and all Canadians since 1963.

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