



National Association
of Federal Retirees

Association nationale
des retraités fédéraux

c/o 865 Shefford Rd
Gloucester, ON K1J 1H9

February 20, 2020

WOMEN VETERANS RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT NETWORK (WREN) INTRODUCTION

Dear Minister XX,

We are delighted to extend our congratulations on your appointment to the cabinet of Canada's 43rd Parliament. Like many Canadians, we are excited by the Speech from the Throne and the transparency of the ministerial mandate letters. We look forward to working with and supporting you to achieve this government's goals, especially as they relate to various biological sex (e.g., females) and gender identity (e.g., women) equity and equality issues.

As you are aware, the Government of Canada wants to have womenⁱ make up one in four members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) by 2026, a challenging goal by anyone's standards. Unfortunately, as more women enter the military, women continue to be injured and medically released at alarming rates. It is therefore not surprising that women are now the fastest growing segment of Veteran Affairs Canada's clients.ⁱⁱ

To this day civilian health research and medical care systems struggle to address their underlying male-normative assumptions and biases.ⁱⁱⁱ Add on top of that the further limitations of military medicine biases and the fact that operational military roles were held exclusively by men until one generation ago. The result is an urgent need for more research on how to ensure equitable, enabling and safe workspaces for everyone, but especially women now working in challenging and previously male only environments, such as the military.

The full integration of women into the military has been tackled head on by other nations who provide dedicated lines of spending for initiatives such as "women's health offices".^{iv} In these countries, efforts are being made to maximize the quick but safe incorporation of women into all military operational roles and environments while ensuring equitable veteran benefits and care. Such efforts require coordinated and systemic action to identify and address remaining research and knowledge gaps, and the subsequent development of knowledge-based practices. Unfortunately, up until now, the Government of Canada has

not developed similar focused action plans for their uniformed service women (military, RCMP, CBSA, coast guard or first responder).

For a variety of complex structural and social reasons, the sex- and gender-specific issues and needs of women veterans in particular have not been equitably addressed at the federal level in Canada.

As a result, a network of concerned civilian and veteran individuals and associations have joined together to amplify the voice and needs of women veterans. We possess among us lived experience as women veterans and subject matter experts (academics, researchers, students, women's health groups, women's rights groups). Together we are the "**Women Veterans Research and Engagement Network**" (**WREN**) and we will be advocating for sex- and gender-informed, evidence-based policies and practices in defence.

We write to you today to signal our arrival as a new stakeholder group seeking to help, individually or collectively, to support this government's sex and gender equity and equality goals, specifically as they pertain to military women (serving and retired/released).

To this end, we are pleased to provide you with our first recommendation, which we hope to see named and funded in the 2020 federal budget:

"All taxpayer/federally funded defence and veteran-related health and wellness research shall follow GBA+ and Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines".

We welcome an opportunity to schedule a meeting with you or your policy staff in the next few weeks. We remain available at any time to answer any questions you or your staff may have on these topic areas.

A member of our team will contact your office to discuss a mutually agreeable time and date.

Sincerely,

WREN Co-Chairs:

Sayward Montague, Director, Advocacy.

Maya Eicher PhD, Academic Researcher.

Karen Breeck MD, Health Care Professional and Veteran.

ⁱ For purposes of WREN, the term "women" is used in this document to include those born female or self-identifying as female and/or self-identifying as a woman.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/pdf/about-vac/research/women-veterans-forum-2019.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2217/17455057.4.3.237>

^{iv} <https://www.womenshealth.gov/about-us/what-we-do/programs-and-activities/active-duty-and-veteran-womens-health>

^v <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50035.html>