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29 April 2019

File: 29-1

Dear Member of Parliament:

The Royal Canadian Legion (the Legion) advocates for actions that will improve the well-being of our veteran community and show them the respect they deserve. The topics in the Legion's 2019 "*It's our duty*" position paper, are in varying stages of progress. In some cases, we have heard talk and promises and await concrete action. We will continue to advocate for these specific changes until we see results.

In presenting our brief position statements, we have considered feedback from the many veterans we serve, and the mandates given to Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence - departments closely tied to our work and whose mandates directly affect our own.

While we appreciate any progress made, we are asking for noticeable improvement in:

- Foundational areas like homelessness and transition to civilian life;
- veteran-related research and medical therapies;
- the Veterans Well-being Act;
- service provision by Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence.

We look forward to working with you, as an elected representative of the Government of Canada, and all key partners so that together we can make life better for our veterans, their families and our communities. More details on the items in this document are found on our website at [Legion.ca](http://Legion.ca)

The Legion will be watching closely over the coming months to evaluate whether elected members are paying close attention to the overall needs of our service men and women. As indicated in the mandate letter to our Minister of Veterans Affairs: "Veterans should not have to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned."

Our veterans' sacrifice and bravery established the very foundation of our way of life and freedom in Canada and they continue to keep us safe in challenging times, and on the international stage - this must *never* be forgotten.

Please forward any questions to my Executive Assistant Angela Keeling Colkitt at [akeeling@legion.ca](mailto:akeeling@legion.ca).

Sincerely,

Thomas D. Irvine, CD  
Dominion President



## ***It's Our Duty: The Royal Canadian Legion advocacy agenda 2019***

### **FOUNDATIONAL ITEMS**

Action is required to improve overall quality of life.

- ***Homelessness*** - we want to see a comprehensive national veterans' homelessness strategy in Canada, with a specific focus on getting veterans off the streets. This strategy should identify gaps in knowledge and service delivery and be coordinated with other service providers.
- ***VIP and Long Term Care access*** - we would like to see increased access to Veterans Independence Program benefits for frail veterans, allowing them to stay in their homes longer. We would also like VAC to enact legislation so that at the time of a veteran's death, the VIP benefits are accessible to a Survivor whenever needed. In addition, we want all eligible Canadian Armed Forces veterans to receive preferred access to vacant Long Term Care beds.
- ***Transition*** – we would like to see more attention paid to how we transition veterans back into civilian life. We need tangible evidence that as promised by our government, military members who are seriously disabled due to service are not being medically released until they are in stable condition, their medical records transferred to VAC, and a case manager assigned.
- ***Veterans and the Census*** – we support the inclusion of a new question in the next short form census in 2021, in an effort to identify Regular and Reserve Force veterans in Canada and help inform future policy and programs.
- ***Military Equipment*** – our military can sometimes face unacceptable delays in acquiring or renewing the equipment they need. This can put our troops at a disadvantage and we ask that they always receive the modern resources and support needed to do their jobs well.

### **RESEARCH & THERAPIES**

We are calling for increased research and support in areas that affect our veterans' overall well-being.

- ***Cannabinoid therapy*** – while cannabis may be legal to use, there is little to no research available for veterans or medical practitioners who are considering this sort of therapy. We are asking for targeted research including an investigation into the monitoring and standards related to cannabinoid therapy, and the drug's therapeutic efficacy.
- ***Mefloquine (Lariam) toxicity*** – we continue to question why mefloquine remains a viable alternative as an anti-malarial drug and are advocating for more research into its use and long term consequences, in particular as it pertains to veterans who received this drug when deployed. We want affected individuals to receive proper diagnosis, care and tailored support.

- **Operational Stress Injuries** – we are calling for more research into the causes, impact and treatment of operational stress injuries, including traumatic brain injuries in our military forces and their families. In addition, our government must continue working to eliminate mental health stigma in the military and police communities.
- **Service Dogs** - The Legion is still waiting for a set of standards for psychiatric service dogs – whether created nationally, by the Government of Canada, or departmentally. We want service animals trained to a high standard. For the safety of both the veteran and the dog, we want to ensure a medical professional has recommended the dog, and that the veteran has the required training and financial resources to receive one. The original governmental promise of standards in 2018 was not kept, nor was the later promise of a replacement version. We continue to call for the establishment of these needed standards as soon as possible.

### THE VETERANS WELL-BEING ACT/PENSION FOR LIFE

We were encouraged by the improvements within the new Pension for Life program in 2018, but later discouraged by the lack of simplicity for end users trying to understand how it affects them personally.

- **Clarity** – veterans need additional details, and plain simple language to understand how they are individually affected by the new Pension for Life program. With that clarity, our Branch and Command Service Officers across the country can then explain the new rules to the many veterans who seek our advice and support in preparing their claims.
- **Family and Caregiver support** – we are pushing for increased support for family and/or caregivers in the form of better financial compensation. We would like to see the establishment of a menu of financial compensation based on lost wages and the degree of disability of the veteran. We would also like to see funding for respite care. We propose that access to Military Family Resource Centres be expanded to include *all* veterans and their families post service.
- **Act modification** – we request renewed assurance that the *Veterans Well-being Act* remains an “evergreen” document, flexible to change as new information comes to light, as originally promised.

### VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

We ask that the following items related to departmental mandate letters be addressed as soon as possible.

- **Collaboration** - we want to see tangible evidence of a collaborative effort between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence to synchronize programs, especially when it comes to the transition of veterans to civilian life; but also to reduce overall complexity, overhaul service delivery, and strengthen partnerships between the two departments – as set out in the departmental mandate letters.
- **Centre for Excellence** – in 2018 we were pleased to see the announcement of the first (virtual) centre of excellence in mental health to enhance research and best practices. We want to see a second centre established soon, concentrating on the identified area of greatest need.

- **Wait times** – the immense backlog of claims processing is well known. Providing veterans with an average wait time is not acceptable and must change immediately with a more streamlined process and additional personnel including adjudicators.
- **Marriage after 60** - We would like to see the elimination of the “marriage after 60” claw back clause, so that surviving spouses of veterans who happened to be married after the age of 60, still receive the appropriate pension and health benefits they deserve.
- **Communication** – we ask for clearer communication overall with veterans about the benefits and services to which they are entitled, and simplified instructions in terms of how to access them.