

# Health, Wellness and Readiness

## Bringing a Human Perspective to the 2016 Defence Policy Review

### Prospect Human Services

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## Background

Personnel issues are an important theme in the Prime Minister's mandate letters to National Defence and Veterans Affairs. Both letters call on the Ministers to "...reduce complexity, overhaul service delivery..." and "...ensure a seamless transition for Canadian Forces members to the programs and services of Veterans Affairs."

"The CMP is responsible for the development of strategies, policies and programs that foster and maintain the profession of arms as an honourable and desirable career..." and "to care for our personnel and their families, in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders, by providing the programs, services and support they need to afford them a rewarding and fulfilling career and assist their transition from military service".

The Defence Policy Review document that is the basis for this submission and roundtable discussions calls for "...an agile and adaptable force that requires well selected, educated and trained personnel who are physically and psychologically fit and resilient." Members of the CAF are drawn from the Canadian population – trained and equipped to carry out the defence mission they are assigned. The vast majority of CAF members will return to that population.

**The onus is on the CAF/DND and Veterans Affairs Canada to ensure that when they leave the military they and their families can take up a productive and happy life, just like their civilian colleagues.**

## The Question

Canadian Military Doctrine (1) states that "the central tenet of the Canadian Forces (CF) is to have adaptable, combat-ready, deployable **forces** trained and willing to fight and win in support of Canadian Government interests". The Doctrine defines operational readiness (OPRED) as "the capability of a unit/formation, ship, weapon system or equipment to perform the missions or functions for which it is organized or designed" (DTB, Record 4983).

In both statements, emphasis is on the personnel required to get the job done. The Public Consultation Document for the 2016 Defence Policy Review asks ten questions, however only one concerns the men, women and families involved:

*"How can the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces improve the way they support the health and wellness of military members? In what areas should more be done?"*

This lonely question limits the required discussion. An additional strategic Human Resource question is:

***"How can the Canadian Armed Forces modernize its efforts to attract and retain the talent required to effectively deliver its mission, now and into the ever changing future?"***

And it is critically important to address this broader question in the context of **unlimited liability**, the cornerstone of military service and the single principle that distinguishes CAF members from their civilian counterparts.

Canadian Military Doctrine requires that all CAF members must accept without reservation that they must carry out their missions and tasks regardless of personal discomfort, fear or danger (1). For this very reason, Canada has an employer obligation to provide the best training, health and wellness support possible – both during and after active service. If this obligation is watered down or perceived to be watered down - military careers will

lose their appeal, especially if CAF members believe that once their usefulness to the organization is over they will be forgotten.

## The Issues

There are unique challenges facing Canadian Armed Forces' recruiting and retention efforts:

- Military families are subject to frequent moves and upheaval; experience difficulty maintaining health care continuity; experience housing challenges; and face career challenges for the non-serving spouse. (2)
- Support for an ill and injured member has been limited by trends toward a Social Contract (with limited liability), away from the long standing Social Covenant. (3)
- When it comes time to transition to a civilian career, for many the transition process will be "complex, lengthy and difficult to navigate" (4), especially for the ill and injured.
- Post-service wellness and quality of life depends on employment and financial independence. Currently, none of the various transition support programs offered by CAF, VAC, SISIP or third parties are driven by or accountable for employment outcomes. Nor are investments tied to the same. This is contrary to the output/outcome measures that the CAF applies to other activities.

**The common thread is employment.**

## The Link between Employment and Wellness/Quality of Life

For personnel to serve in confidence, they must know that supports are in place, particularly in the unfortunate event of illness or injury. The Government of Canada, in its response to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs' Report: Improving Services to Support Quality of Life for Veterans and Their Families acknowledged that *"employment after service is a key factor to health, well-being and quality of life after service"*. (5)

Securing gainful employment has been seen as a key goal to a successful transition from military to civilian life, not just for the financial stability it creates for the veteran, but also for the secondary benefits for the veteran and the community at large (6). Beyond the military, research from around the world confirms employment as a key determinant of quality of life (7, 8, 9).

This connection between employment and quality of life is particularly critical for people with disabilities, the ill and injured. Military studies confirm the link (6, 10, 11, 12).

## The Current System Struggles to Respond to Health, Wellness and Quality of Life Issues

The support and organizational infrastructure required to address the issues (page 1) is inadequate because:

- Expectations have lowered as government policy has shifted from Social Covenant to Social Contract (with limited liability and support) philosophy.
- Care of the employment transition needs for the ill and injured (while in CAF or after service) is limited to pre-employment, vocational rehabilitation models that get people to the point of transition to civilian employment, but not *through* the transition process and into successful second careers. These models on their own make up an incomplete system. The objective is to align resources with all needs.

Furthermore, these models are not focused on retention and employer capacity and also do not consider that in 2016, the best employers understand their duty to accommodate for illness/disability and are looking for candidates whose skill sets match their requirements. These models also fail to

recognize that illness or injury do not necessarily equate to a lack of skill. The CAF has made significant training investments during the course of a member's career. Given the right employment transition supports, the experience and skill set an individual has acquired through their military career can be re-positioned with a civilian employer. The emphasis could be on aligning what the individual can contribute with an employer's workforce requirements; and ensuring the employer has the capability to embed the member in their team and set the individual up for success. For many individuals, employment is key to recovery and maintaining the quality of life they had in their military careers.

**What is lacking is active and direct job placement and retention supports for both individuals and employers.**

Direct job placement and retention supports could be offered in conjunction with the existing models – or as an alternative.

- All of the above stigmatize those who need help most, leading to denial or lack of disclosure. Members fear the career ending 'kiss of death' associated with disclosure and universality of service, and avoid or delay necessary critical care, exacerbating the issues.

## The Solutions/Shifts

The CAF needs a modernized employment strategy that enables it to attract and retain the right people. Transition services and enabling successful second careers in the civilian workforce are important parts of this strategy.

The Canadian Government aspires to be globally recognized as a leader in veterans' care. This will require a hard look at how to expedite the transition to a better service system – including how contracting and procurement can be less obstructive. The CAF will need to apply the same innovation the military is known for to its human resource strategy and practices. This includes:

- Applying innovative recruiting and retention practices so that any member – regardless of their motive for serving or their reason for transitioning - is assured that the right policies, programs and capabilities are in place to support their transition to civilian life – including employment.
- Making the connection between the quality of transition support and the ability to attract and retain the CAF workforce.
- Rethinking civilian employer and military partnerships and how they can support mutual workforce objectives, as opposed to viewing civilian employer partnerships as a threat.
- Understanding that the ill and injured are skilled, but require the right support.
- Ensuring that all commands within the command structure are backed by the same horsepower and capability beyond the leadership level.

Service in the CAF can and often does have long-term negative effects on the physical, mental and financial well-being of both CAF members and their families – during and after service.

In return, members should have confidence that they and their families have earned a commitment from the Government of Canada to take responsibility for their ongoing health, wellness and care.

It is essential to get this right at the policy level. The irony is that many of the ill and injured acquired these conditions as a result of protecting a way of life they and their families will ultimately join – civilian life. It is time to define and strengthen the social covenant between Canada and those committed to defending this country. Improved health, wellness and quality of life during and after military service will build CAF recruitment and retention success. The solutions and shifts under such a policy umbrella are summarized in the table below.

Shift FROM	Shift TOWARDS
Contract/ Insurance Model – cost reduction	Covenant Model – mandate to care
Focus on Illness and Injury	Focus on Skills and Workplace Supports
Vocational Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation Synched with Direct Placement, Accommodation and Retention Services
Focus on Members	Focus on Members and Their Families
Employment Focus at Time of Transition	Career Support for Family Members, Reservists, Transitioning Members, ‘Universality of Service’ Released, and At-Risk Vets
Focus on Pre-Employment Support	Focus on Employment Outcomes
Complex, Isolated, Incomplete Siloed Services (CAF, VAC, SISIP and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Party)	A Collaborative System Leveraging 3 <sup>rd</sup> party expertise (integrated, seamless and client driven)
Transition support / civilian employment apart from retention strategy	Serving with confidence intrinsically tied to retention strategy

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