

Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

The Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) is a pan-Canadian organization of 23 universities, consulting with the Department of National Defence (DND) and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), led by Queen's University and the Royal Military College of Canada. The resources invested in CIMVHR and the work undertaken in support of military personnel, veterans and their families by leading Canadian experts and researchers advances evidence-informed health care practices, policies and programs to ensure that veterans can contribute to Canada's economic success as productive workers, innovators, skilled personnel and business leaders. Mental and physical health challenges prevent many Canadians from participating fully in society and contributing to the economy. Veterans and their families are particularly vulnerable. CIMVHR's goal is to optimize the potential of every one of the over 700,000 veterans living in Canada, and the evidence shows that this issue needs our focused attention. Canadian Forces veterans released from service during 1998-2007 were reported to be in poorer health and to have a greater number of disabilities when compared to the general Canadian population.¹ The majority of those who reported chronic health conditions or a disability diagnosed by a health professional attributed their conditions to military service. One quarter of military veterans also reported a difficult adjustment to civilian life.¹ In addition, many receive Employment Insurance (EI) and experience a decline in income post-release.² On average, Canada invests over \$200,000 dollars training each member of the Canadian Forces, adding a net positive value to our military. However, when military personnel leave the Canadian Forces, often with decades of employment ahead of them, the return on investment for Canada can be lost unless they are able to find meaningful work. CIMVHR's mandate is to determine what interventions, supports, programs and policy changes are most effective and efficient in transitioning these veterans to a productive civilian life.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

Financially, the return on investment for funding CIMVHR will be substantial. It would take a fraction of underemployed veterans to better participate in the workforce due to CIMVHR-led interventions, to realize a real gain on investment. CIMVHR is committed to finding specific areas of veterans' health-care that will best help veterans fully utilize the skills that they have acquired while in service and to regain meaningful employment. On average, all veterans experience a decline in income post-release (10% during the first three years post-release), but the impact is greatest amongst younger veterans, women and those who were released for medical reasons.² Women experienced a 30% decline, medically released personnel a 29% decline and veterans who served from 10 to 19 years a 21% decline in

income.² Many veterans received EI post-release. In the year following release, the rate of receipt of EI was 17%. This rate declined each year post-release. Over one-third (35%) of veterans received EI at least once post-release. The highest rates of ever receiving EI were among those released as Privates (59%), who are younger and often have difficulty finding jobs. We have a highly skilled segment of the population who are not returning to the workforce in the capacity in which they could. This is partially because among veterans receiving services from VAC, the great majority (92%) had at least one physical health condition diagnosed by a health professional, about half (40-60%) had at least one mental health condition and the majority had low levels of health-related quality of life.¹ Many federal programs are designed to help veterans return to the work force, such as the “Helmets to Hardhats” program and the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) education and preferential hiring programs. In addition, many millions a year are spent on helping veterans manage their health care needs such as the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) and the Health Benefits Program offered by VAC. Research undertaken by CIMVHR seeks to ensure that programs such as these are most effectively targeted and tailored to achieve meaningful results for veterans and their families.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

The Canadian Government has provided our military going into battle with some of the best training and equipment in the world. However, we must ensure that when these soldiers return to their “new battlefield,” a personal battlefield that is marked by physical and mental injuries, as well as social challenges in reintegrating into work, family and community life, that we provide them the most effective support that we can. The focused research undertaken by CIMVHR helps to address these challenges and leads to effective solutions for these individuals and their families. As veterans reintegrate into the workforce, attention must be paid to their capacity to contribute to the job market and their unique health needs. Veterans who suffered health consequences from service reported higher rates of perceived stress than those who were not medically released. In a survey on transitions to civilian life, younger veterans were least satisfied with their current job or main activity and had the lowest rates of perceived connection to their community. A significant proportion (27-52%) of all veterans also reported low social support upon return to civilian life.¹ It is essential that we understand factors affecting veterans’ productivity and that we ensure that the appropriate programs, supports and policies are in place to help them remain active members of society. CIMVHR has already built unique, pan-Canadian research teams that have helped VAC determine if their career transition services are effective, and to identify the most common health problems keeping veterans out of the workforce. For instance, through research we helped the Canadian Forces evaluate their mental health treatment programs. Our researchers are currently determining if they can use brain biomarkers to determine if post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be distinguished from mild traumatic brain injury thereby leading to appropriate, focused treatment techniques. These discoveries can help this unique segment of society receive the correct treatment, re-engage with society and become contributing members of the workforce. 1. Thompson, J., MacLean, M., Van Til, L., Sweet, J., Poirier, A. Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Report on Regular Force Veterans. VAC / DND Report. Jan., 2011.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

As this critical segment of society ages, it is essential to keep them functioning as productive members of society. And, the needs of this group extend well beyond military veterans to first responders including police, firefighters, paramedics and humanitarian workers who encounter similar situations and environments. Based on their unique experiences and health care needs, these groups can be at a disadvantage, and as a result, their contributions to Canadian productivity are not always reaching their full potential. It is important that this issue be addressed and CIMVHR's research is making a significant contribution in this area. It is also working to ensure that this critical research reaches those who can use it, such as health care providers, program developers and policy makers. Military personnel are exposed to unique risks, exposures and experiences that demand a high level of protection, prevention and care. While investing in the well-being of serving military members is understood, there is less appreciation of the benefits of improving the health care for veterans. Yet the benefits are enormous: as a major population in Canada, healthy veterans can have a real impact on the economy and their communities. Government support for the development of programs and policies, particularly those oriented towards health, led by CIMVHR are an important investment towards improved productivity in a number of ways: • It will directly impact the workforce productivity of a significant number of the 700,000 Canadian veterans and positively affect the economy; • It will reduce health care costs provided to the military and health insurance costs provided by VAC; • It will create jobs in areas such as technology, research, and health care; and • Knowledge generated by the research will also benefit all first responders (e.g., police, fire, medical personnel and non-government organizations) and the entire Canadian population, as demonstrated by the Afghanistan operation, which has already produced leading edge research on trauma care. 2. MacLean, M., Van Til, L., Thompson, J., Poirier, A., Sweet, J., Pedlar, D. Income Study: Regular Force Veteran Report. VAC / DND Report. Jan., 2011.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

As of now, more Canadian military personnel have served in Afghanistan than in Korea. We have also experienced the largest number of injuries since the Korean War and these injuries are more complex. Parliament has been advised that 1 in 5 of those who served in Afghanistan, and our other recent missions, will suffer from mental health issues, and it is unknown if the scope of the problem is even greater. This extremely large population of Canadian military veterans, those currently serving and their families, comprise a community with unique experiences and needs that must be addressed with appropriately unique solutions. CIMVHR research addresses health and well-being issues over the life of serving and former military personnel as related to occupational exposures, experiences and environment. These include health consequences – physical, mental and social – that are unique in their nature, magnitude, long-term effects, delayed presentation and trans-generational implications. Outcomes of CIMVHR's targeted, applicable research leads to evidence-based comprehensive treatment programs and services for both prevention and mitigation of the trauma associated with modern warfare. The broad scope and complexity of health issues facing soldiers, veterans and their families calls for even greater coordination of academic and government research efforts, as well as an expanded national capacity. Such a coordinated effort makes better use of existing resources, expedites return of veterans to productive citizenship, reduces health care costs by keeping veterans out of

expensive hospital beds, leverages Canadian research opportunities with our military allies internationally and enhances Canadian industry opportunities to bring research outcomes to the market. Funding for CIMVHR directly enables an effective transition of military personnel to productive civilian lives. CIMVHR is oriented to respond to government priorities for research, and to develop concrete and practical solutions to an array of complex and unique health and social consequences that impact veterans and their families. We propose that the Government of Canada invest in the CIMVHR's work to improve health and social programs and services, that support a successful transition of military personnel and veterans to the civilian workforce.