



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **MOVING TOWARDS ENDING HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**Neil R. Ellis, Chair**

**MAY 2019  
42<sup>nd</sup> PARLIAMENT, 1<sup>st</sup> SESSION**

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**Neil R. Ellis  
Chair**

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## **NOTICE TO READER**

### **Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons**

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

has the honour to present its

## **TWELFTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied homeless veterans and has agreed to report the following:





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## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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*As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.*

### **Recommendation 1**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada work in partnership with community agencies dedicated to helping veterans and establish ways for continual contact between the department and veterans, with the latters' permission..... 9**

### **Recommendation 2**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada note the various signs of veterans who may be at risk of homelessness and proactively engage with them to prevent homelessness..... 9**

### **Recommendation 3**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with Employment and Social Development Canada and organizations supporting academic research, continue its efforts to better understand veterans' homelessness, taking into account the overrepresentation of women and Indigenous peoples..... 10**

### **Recommendation 4**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada continue, in partnership with other federal, provincial/territorial and municipal organizations concerned, and with the community agencies dedicated to helping veterans in need, to implement action plans such as the National Housing Strategy to eradicate homelessness among veterans. .... 11**

### **Recommendation 5**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence ensure that veterans receive confirmation of their service within a reasonable length of time. .... 12**

#### **Recommendation 6**

That Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that the section of its website concerning homelessness among veterans is updated regularly and offers the most recent information available. .... 13

#### **Recommendation 7**

That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) sign a memorandum of understanding to make RCMP veterans eligible for the Veterans Emergency Fund under the same terms and conditions as Canadian Armed Forces veterans..... 15

#### **Recommendation 8**

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#### **Recommendation 9**

That the Government of Canada create a rent supplement for veterans who are homeless and that this supplement be part of its overall strategy to address homelessness among veterans..... 24

#### **Recommendation 10**

That the Government of Canada ensure that initiatives dedicated to veterans under the National Housing Strategy are open to veterans with service dogs. .... 24



# MOVING TOWARDS ENDING HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of veterans who are homeless first emerged in the United States. A series of studies conducted in the mid-1980s and early 1990s showed that veterans comprised 11% of the adult male population in the U.S., but up to 26% of the male homeless population.<sup>1</sup> Studies conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom in the mid-2000s, however, estimated that veterans made up only 3% of the male homeless population.<sup>2</sup>

In Canada, awareness of the issue came later. As of the mid-2000s, anecdotal evidence from community agencies suggested that veterans might make up a significant percentage of Canada's homeless population. The 2011 study by Ray and Forchuk was the first to examine this subject from a national perspective. The purpose of the study was not to estimate the scope of the problem in Canada, but to gain an understanding of the factors underlying homelessness based on the individual experiences of 54 veterans who are homeless. Three main themes emerged: alcoholism triggering a downward spiral; a disparity in the quality of services available from shelters and public institutions; and difficulty transitioning from military to civilian life.

Based on the findings of this initial study, the ongoing dedication of community organizations and the commitment by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to help solve this problem, other studies have been conducted to better identify the extent of the issue and the services that would result in the best outcomes. This research has begun to produce results, providing a clearer picture of homelessness among Canada's veterans and identifying the most promising of the many initiatives launched in the past decade.

The purpose of this report is to review efforts over the past few years regarding three aspects of homelessness among Canadian veterans, which are examined in three sections of the report:

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1 Ray, Susan L. and Cheryl Forchuk, *The Experience of Homelessness Among Canadian Forces and Allied Forces Veterans*, Lawson Health Research Institute / University of Western Ontario, 2011, pp. 9–10.

2 Ray and Forchuk (2011), p. 9.



- 1) the scope of the problem based on the most recent statistics and their identified shortcomings;
- 2) the priority that the Government of Canada, and Veterans Affairs Canada in particular, places on fighting homelessness among veterans; and
- 3) the many community-based and private-sector initiatives designed to assist veterans who are homeless, and the support that the Government of Canada could provide them with.

Pursuant to the [resolution passed on 19 June 2018](#), the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (the Committee) held six meetings and heard from 22 witnesses. The main findings that emerged from the Committee's study are as follows:

- Homelessness likely affects between 3,000 and 5,000 veterans, or between 4.6 per 1,000 and 7.7 per 1,000 of the nearly 650,000 veterans living in Canada.
- Given the limited scope of the problem, a concerted strategy could be developed that would completely eliminate homelessness among veterans in a few years.
- To be successful, any initiative to help veterans who are homeless depends on VAC being heavily involved and leveraging its rehabilitation and financial support programs.
- However, VAC can maintain only a limited presence on the ground and must rely on the many activities of community organizations, which are the only stakeholders that can restore trust between veterans who are homeless and the public institutions capable of mobilizing the resources needed to help them reintegrate.

The problems experienced by veterans who are homeless often find their source in a difficult transition from military to civilian life. Everything that can be learned about veterans who are homeless and any measures likely to help them can be applied to developing preventive measures for at-risk veterans and to better supporting veterans experiencing difficulties, no matter how serious.

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

*The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada* was published in March 2015 by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)<sup>3</sup>. According to the study, “Most veterans who are homeless are adult males, and overall they tend to be older than homeless non-Veterans” (p. 8). Of the 700,000 veterans living in Canada in 2014, approximately 2,250 used homeless shelters during that year. As we will see later, shelter use alone is not sufficient to estimate the total number of veterans who are homeless in Canada, but it does help to establish an objective baseline for measuring future changes and comparing the extent of the problem in Canada with that of other countries.<sup>4</sup> Of all shelter users registered with the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System, about 2.7% were veterans.<sup>5</sup> This rate is far below that of the United States for the same year. According to the *Annual Homelessness Assessment Report* (AHAR), 11.3% of homeless adults in the U.S. in 2014 were veterans.

However, this comparison between the United States and Canada can be misleading, as it does not account for the much higher percentage of veterans in the U.S. population. In addition, the U.S. government has worked hard for about the past 15 years to reduce the number of veterans who are homeless, and these efforts have produced results. According to the [2017 AHAR](#), the number of veterans who are homeless in the U.S. declined from 73,367 in 2009 to 40,056 in 2017. A comparison with Canada is not possible, as the ESDC report is the first to produce reliable national figures on veterans who are homeless.

In 2014, there were about 21 million veterans in the United States, 30 times more than in Canada, for a population approximately nine times larger than ours: 318.6 million in the United States compared with 35.5 million in Canada. If the number of veterans who used shelters in 2014 is compared with the number of veterans in the country, Canada’s ratio is more than double that of the United States: 3.2 veterans per 1,000 (2,250 out of 700,000 veterans) in Canada, versus 1.5 veterans per 1,000 (32,119 out of 21 million) in the United States.<sup>6</sup> These differences can be explained by a number of factors: the broader definition of “veteran” in Canada; more points of access to services and higher visibility in the United States (152 veterans’ hospitals, 1,400 veterans’ outpatient

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3 Employment and Social Development Canada, *The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada*, 2015.

4 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee of Veterans Affairs (ACVA), 27 November 2018, 1535.

5 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1535.

6 The U.S. data for 2014 are from the [2017 AHAR](#) and the [National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics](#).



clinics/centres, numerous local charitable organizations); different shelter networks in both countries; and different shelter user profiles. Given the data currently available, it is impossible to determine whether the problem is proportionally more serious in Canada than in the United States.

Two years after the initial ESDC study, another study allowed for a clearer picture of the number of veterans who are homeless in Canada in 2014. Based on a larger and more accurate sample, it was estimated that, in 2014, “2.2% of shelter users – an estimated 2,950 people – reported having served in the military.”<sup>7</sup> Aaron Segart, author and principal investigator for both studies, stated that “the figure of 2,950 is more accurate than the initial study with the estimate of 2,250 veterans.”<sup>8</sup> Mr. Segart went on to say that Canadian veterans are not overrepresented in shelters, contrary to the findings in the United States. In fact, they represent 2% to 3% of the total shelter population and account for 2.4% of the Canadian population.<sup>9</sup>

Other witnesses presented statistics that indicated veterans’ homelessness to be a more serious problem than described in the ESDC study. For example, Faith McIntyre of Veterans Affairs Canada stated that veterans represent 5% of all homeless persons in Canada, not 2% to 3%.<sup>10</sup> The figures depend on the methodology used for the count. Ms. McIntyre’s data are from a point-in-time count conducted in the spring of 2016 by ESDC. Departmental representatives visited shelters across the country on a specific day to count the total number of people who used the shelter that day. The figure of 5% represents the percentage of people counted who reported having served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Data from a point-in-time count are not as useful for estimating the number of veterans who are homeless as data collected over a full year. In Vancouver, for example, these point-in-time counts give very different results from one year to the next: 95 in 2015; 127 in 2016; 168 in 2017; and 111 in 2018.<sup>11</sup> The President and Chief Executive Officer of the Old

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7 Employment and Social Development Canada, [\*The National Shelter Study 2005–2014: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada\*](#), 2017, p. 35.

8 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1535.

9 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1535.

10 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

11 Cst Alyson Smith (Homeless Outreach Coordinator, Centralized Operations Services Section, Vancouver Police Department), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1530.



Brewery Mission in Montréal stated that about 2% of the agency's clients are veterans.<sup>12</sup> The full-year count provides an overall view that prevents undercounting or overcounting.

These estimates must be viewed with caution, however. For example, veterans who are homeless might tend to use shelters less than other homeless people. Cheryl Forchuk told the Committee that veterans do not like the unstructured nature of the services in shelters.<sup>13</sup> Angus Stanfield of Cockrell House shared this view:

[Veterans] are more likely to avoid society, to shun the urban setting. You're not going to see them sitting on the corner in a city. You're just not. It's back to that pride. A lot of the ones who are still of age are possibly living in the bush. We found them living there, or maybe they have a camper that's sitting on the ground and stuck away. Also they're couch surfing.<sup>14</sup>

Given the available data and the reservations expressed, the total number of veterans who are homeless in Canada can be estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals.

## Portrait of Homeless Canadian Veterans

The research also highlights certain distinguishing characteristics of veterans who are homeless in Canada. For example, while women account for 10% to 15% of the total number of veterans, they represent 30% of the veterans who are homeless who use shelters. This percentage is the same for the overall shelter population. Among veterans who are homeless using shelters who are under the age of 30, more than half are women.<sup>15</sup>

Another finding is that veterans have a higher rate of episodic homelessness than other shelter users, which means that they are about twice as likely as others to experience at least three episodes of homelessness in a given year.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1600.

13 Ms. Cheryl Forchuk (Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Parkwood Institute Research, and Assistant Director, Lawson Health Research Institute), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1535.

14 Mr. Angus Stanfield (Chairman, Cockrell House, South Mid-Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1545. See also Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1600.

15 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1535.

16 Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1535.



According to two studies presented by Cheryl Forchuk, Canadian veterans who are homeless are very different from those analyzed in U.S. research.<sup>17</sup> To begin with, military service was a positive experience for most of the Canadian veterans interviewed and a negative one for American veterans. This could help to explain why approximately one-quarter of the veterans released from the Canadian military since 1998 found the transition to be difficult.<sup>18</sup> According to Matthew Pearce of the Old Brewery Mission, most of the veterans who have used this Montreal shelter had no combat experience and had left the CAF at least a decade previously.<sup>19</sup>

The Canadian veterans interviewed also tended to drink more heavily during their military service and developed a drinking problem in the 10-to-20 years following their release from the military.

Lastly, Ms. Forchuk told the Committee that post-traumatic stress disorder is rarely the underlying reason for homelessness, even among the veterans who suffer from it.<sup>20</sup> Other factors lead to homelessness, such as difficulty adapting to civilian life, and alcohol and substance abuse. Debbie Lowther of VETS Canada described the complex, interrelated issues that can cause veterans to become homeless:

We know that there are many pathways into homeless, such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, job loss or instability, mental illness and addictions, physical health problems, family or domestic violence, and family or marital breakdown. What sets veterans apart is that they not only deal with all of these same issues but they also struggle with their transition from military to civilian life. I talked about the military being a unique culture. Well, now the veteran is trying to adapt to a new civilian culture, feeling as though they have lost their identity and doing so without the social support network that was always so important.<sup>21</sup>

All these issues highlight the complexity of the problem and the many possible reasons for the downward spiral into homelessness. In order to prevent the negative

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17 Ms. Cheryl Forchuk (Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Parkwood Institute Research, and Assistant Director, Lawson Health Research Institute), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1535.

18 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

19 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1605. For a similar description of RCMP veterans, see Mr. Ralph Mahar (Executive Officer, RCMP Veterans' Association), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1710.

20 Ms. Cheryl Forchuk (Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Parkwood Institute Research, and Assistant Director, Lawson Health Research Institute), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1535.

21 Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1530.

consequences of this spiral, and to ensure that veterans who are at risk receive all the support they need, the Committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 1**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada work in partnership with community agencies dedicated to helping veterans and establish ways for continual contact between the department and veterans, with the latters' permission.**

#### **Recommendation 2**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada note the various signs of veterans who may be at risk of homelessness and proactively engage with them to prevent homelessness.**

### **Research Needs**

The preceding section highlights both the importance of research as a starting point for identifying problems and the gaps in this research. For example, women's overrepresentation in the population of veterans who are homeless, compared with their representation among veterans in general, needs to be better explained so that programs and services can be developed to serve their often-overlooked needs. There are no studies on this issue or on the overrepresentation of Indigenous veterans in the homeless population, despite anecdotal evidence to this effect.<sup>22</sup> Phil Ralph of Wounded Warriors Canada explained the situation clearly:

Supporting research doesn't sound sexy, but it's important. It's a substantial part of our budget as well. All our programs are the subject of ongoing research, either by CIPSRT or by the University of Victoria. It costs us extra money to deliver programs that way, but in the end it also means that it's not about "hey, Joe thought it was a good idea, Fred thought it was a good idea and Phil thought it was a good idea", but about how the evidence actually says it is the best idea. It's important to do those linkages.<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing the need to develop programs based on the most recent evidence, the Committee recommends as follows:

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22 Ms. Cheryl Forchuk (Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Parkwood Institute Research, and Assistant Director, Lawson Health Research Institute), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1540.

23 Mr. Philip Ralph (National Program Director, Wounded Warriors Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1620. See also Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1610.



### Recommendation 3

**That Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with Employment and Social Development Canada and organizations supporting academic research, continue its efforts to better understand veterans' homelessness, taking into account the overrepresentation of women and Indigenous peoples.**

### A Problem That Can Be Solved

Veterans' homelessness is a very real problem, but it is less severe than the situation experienced in the United States over the past 20 years. Actions taken by the U.S. government also show that it can be solved with a determined and coordinated effort. Given that there are an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Canada, this problem can be eliminated here as well. In Canada, veterans' homelessness is an issue that can be solved one veteran at a time.

That point was driven home by Matthew Pearce, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Old Brewery Mission, an agency that has been operating in Montréal since 1889. Shelters provide crucial emergency assistance that certainly helps to save lives but, as Mr. Pearce noted, "if that's all we're offering, it's facilitating homelessness."<sup>24</sup> The real solution to getting people off the street is to shift the focus from shelters to long-term housing:

We set about not just finding a way to house 18 or 19 veterans; we set about ending veterans' homelessness in Montreal. We thought that if we were seeing about 45 a year and we're the largest resource, then there might be another five or six who aren't coming to our doors and are going to other doors. However, we're seeing the lion's share of the homeless veteran population in Montreal. We think that kind of number is quite manageable to eliminate.<sup>25</sup>

This approach was echoed by Tim Richter, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness:

I believe that with a focused effort and a sense of urgency, veteran homelessness in Canada could be eliminated within three years or less.... We have to document the names and unique needs of every veteran experiencing homelessness and have an ability to share that information among those in the community who can house and support them. We have to be able to monitor performance, notice fluctuations, identify

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24 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1600.

25 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1600.

problems and respond in real time.... We should carve out of the new Canada housing benefit a federally administered veteran housing benefit.<sup>26</sup>

The statistics presented by various organizations seem to support the belief that this problem can be solved. For example, when Dave Gordon of the Royal Canadian Legion described the initiatives funded by his organization, it was easy to see that there are real people behind the statistics, who have had difficulties but can recover with the right help:

I can tell you that we have the names of every veteran who's come forward and who we've identified. We can go back in their file and see the help we've given them. We're very happy to say that we've housed about 350 of the 667 that we've found.

We have very extensive stats. We do, as I said, 134 towns and cities; we have found 280 in Toronto, 45 in London, 45 in Kingston, seven in Trenton, two in Belleville, and the list goes on. We have those stats. We can back them up and we can show you the exact amount of money that was spent for any part of that in any one of those towns or cities.<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Richter explained that an individualized approach is key to solving the problem:

[W]e end veteran homelessness one person at a time. We have to have an individualized response. We make sweeping assumptions about veterans, but I can tell you that the 23-year-old female homeless veteran is very different from the 35-year-old Afghan veteran with a physical disability and from the 50-year-old peacetime veteran who has no service-related injury that can account for their homelessness.<sup>28</sup>

Believing that the problem of veterans' homelessness can be eradicated, the Committee recommends as follows:

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada continue, in partnership with other federal, provincial/territorial and municipal organizations concerned, and with the community agencies dedicated to helping veterans in need, to implement action plans such as the National Housing Strategy to eradicate homelessness among veterans.**

For this type of plan to succeed, one of the first obstacles to overcome is the length of time required to confirm a veteran's record of service and determine eligibility for VAC

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26 Mr. Tim Richter (President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness), *Evidence, ACVA*, 29 November 2018, 1635.

27 Mr. Dave Gordon (Homeless Veterans' Representative, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence, ACVA*, 22 November 2018, 1555.

28 Mr. Tim Richter (President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness), *Evidence, ACVA*, 29 November 2018, 1710.



programs. This may seem like a simple issue, but it can have very significant consequences; for example, a veteran's status must be confirmed before participating in the Old Brewery Mission's Sentinels in the Streets program. Mr. Pearce told the Committee that homeless people may go to the shelter and falsely claim to be veterans in the hope of participating in support programs:

We found out that having people vetted, if you'll pardon the pun, to see if they were in fact veterans by going through VAC was a long, arduous and time-consuming process. You have to understand that if somebody's homeless inside a shelter, whether they're a veteran or not, they may not linger in that condition for very long. If you can't respond to them very quickly, you'll lose them and they'll disappear. We had cases that took as much as two months to verify. We did lose some veterans in the process, who may have resolved their homelessness on their own, but they didn't participate in the sentinels program.<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult to understand why it takes so long to obtain such simple information. The introduction of a veterans' identity card in September 2018 may alleviate this problem for recent veterans, but since homelessness generally occurs at least 10 years after release from the military, most of the people at risk today cannot count on this solution. Therefore, the Committee recommends as follows:

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence ensure that veterans receive confirmation of their service within a reasonable length of time.**

### **VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA'S PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS WHO ARE HOMELESS**

The VAC website features a page on [veterans' homelessness](#). Unfortunately, the contents of the page have not been updated in three years. It contains a notice regarding the ESDC study mentioned previously,<sup>30</sup> which says that the study will "be published in fall 2016."<sup>31</sup> This study has been available for two years. The "[Background](#)" link on the veterans' homelessness page leads to information that refers to a 2013 study. Aside from a brief [sub-section](#) about the Veterans Emergency Fund, which was added recently,

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29 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1605; see also Mr. William Webb (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1655.

30 Employment and Social Development Canada, [The National Shelter Study 2005–2014, Emergency Shelter Use in Canada, 2017](#).

31 Veterans Affairs Canada, [Veteran Homelessness in Canada](#).

the other pages in the section are either out of date or give very general information that does not impart a full understanding of veterans' homelessness in Canada.

Given that the VAC website is often the first point of contact for veterans and their primary source of information, the lack of attention paid to the section on veterans' homelessness could give the impression that this issue is not a priority. Therefore, the Committee recommends as follows:

### **Recommendation 6**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that the section of its website concerning homelessness among veterans is updated regularly and offers the most recent information available.**

VAC's initiatives can be divided into two areas: emergency funding for veterans who are in crisis and help for veterans who are homeless through local organizations supported by the department. Veterans who are homeless are, of course, eligible for the VAC programs offered to all veterans, including transition programs and mental health services.

### **Veterans Emergency Fund**

The Veterans Emergency Fund (VEF) was announced in Budget 2017 and launched on 1 April 2018. Its purpose is to "provide funds to assist Veterans and their families during times of crisis and when facing emergency financial situations that threaten their health and well-being."<sup>32</sup>

Funding for the VEF was set at \$1 million annually for four years. VAC representative Robert Tomljenovic told the Committee that "as of November 15, there have been 416 approvals, and roughly \$676,519 has been put out."<sup>33</sup> Given the strong demand for funding, the government asked for an additional \$300,000 in the *Supplementary Estimates (B) 2018-19*.

Under the VEF, the maximum amount payable per veteran is \$2,500 per fiscal year. This amount may be increased to a maximum of \$10,000 in exceptional circumstances. The purpose of the program is to provide one-time payments for eligible expenses such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care and expenses required to maintain safety and shelter. Recurring expenses like rent or vehicle payments are not eligible. If necessary,

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32 VAC, *Veterans Emergency Fund: Terms and Conditions*.

33 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1605.



VAC will make payments to a third party on behalf of the applicant.<sup>34</sup> Veterans do not have to be receiving other VAC benefits to be eligible for the VEF.

Before the VEF was established, VAC provided low-income veterans with financial assistance, but the eligibility criteria and the approval process were more complex and took longer than under the VEF. In most cases, the department had to involve third-party organizations.<sup>35</sup> For example, financial support for veterans who are homeless is available through the Royal Canadian Legion's Poppy Trust Funds, the [Royal Canadian Navy Benevolent Fund](#) and the [Support Our Troops](#) program administered by the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

Under the VEF, Veterans Affairs Canada defines an emergency as:

a situation that requires immediate action. It is one that if financial support is not provided, the situation will directly affect the health and safety of a Veteran or their family members. An emergency can be caused by a defined event, or it can be the result of other unexpected circumstances that have contributed to a current and urgent need for funding.<sup>36</sup>

Non-recurrence appears to be the most important condition for determining whether a need is an emergency or not. For example, first and last months' rent constitutes a single payment and the value cannot exceed the allowable amount of \$2,500, except in exceptional circumstances.<sup>37</sup> Once this one-time assistance has been provided, the department can call on other organizations to help with recurring needs that do not meet the VEF's criteria for emergency assistance or it can request extra help like the "apartment kits" that the Royal Canadian Legion provides.<sup>38</sup>

During his appearance before the Committee, Ralph Mahar, Executive Officer, RCMP Veterans' Association, criticized the fact that Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) veterans, 7,000 of whom belong to his organization, are not eligible for the VEF.<sup>39</sup> This example illustrates the grey areas surrounding VAC's role in supporting RCMP veterans.

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34 VAC, [Veterans Emergency Fund: Terms and Conditions](#).

35 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1630.

36 VAC, *Veterans Emergency Fund*, ["Questions and answers."](#)

37 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1630.

38 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1600.

39 Mr. Ralph Mahar (Executive Officer, RCMP Veterans' Association), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1605.



They are eligible for some VAC programs under certain memoranda of agreement. For example, VAC pays a pension to RCMP veterans with a disability based on the conditions and amounts set out in the *Pension Act*.

In order for VAC to provide RCMP veterans with emergency funding, VAC and the RCMP would need to sign a memorandum of understanding. Mr. Mahar explained that the RCMP Veterans' Association currently assists members who are in need through the RCMP Benefit Trust Fund, but this fund receives an annual allotment of only \$50,000.

After a year of operation, the VEF has clearly demonstrated that it meets a need. It is reasonable to assume that it would perform a similar service for RCMP veterans if they too were eligible for it. Therefore, the Committee recommends as follows:

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) sign a memorandum of understanding to make RCMP veterans eligible for the Veterans Emergency Fund under the same terms and conditions as Canadian Armed Forces veterans.**

### **Raising Awareness in the Community Sector**

The fight against homelessness demands the active involvement of all levels of government working closely with the community agencies that best understand the many local aspects of the problem. There are a few community organizations dedicated to supporting veterans who are homeless, but most assist people in need more generally and are not necessarily aware of veterans' specific requirements. Given its nationwide presence and programs for veterans in need, VAC plays a de facto national role in raising awareness among community organizations.<sup>40</sup>

Speaking on behalf of VAC, Robert Tomljenovic stated that the first obstacle agencies encounter when they try to facilitate contact between veterans in need and the department is that veterans do not really trust government institutions:

That comment is dead-on. In my offices we've seen veterans who have been identified as being very hesitant to either come into the office or speak to—quote, unquote—a government official. In those instances, we don't rush. The first thing we need to do is build trust with a veteran who has that sort of paranoia with the department, or who, for whatever reason, has had a bad experience in terms of either his military or personal life.

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40 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1545.



We don't rush case management. We don't rush what we call developing a case plan and goals. The immediate need there is to build trust, even if that means we visit the veteran every day for five to 10 minutes, maybe with a community worker, if the veteran has one.

Until that trust is built, it's very difficult for them to engage.<sup>41</sup>

As a result, community workers must be able to reach out to veterans in need about the benefits of contacting the department. For its part, VAC has stepped up its efforts to inform the organizations serving homeless people about its services.

For example, it has distributed a [poster to](#) these organizations to help them identify the veterans among their clients. According to its website, VAC has “provided information on its programs and services to approximately 200 community organizations that work with the homeless in more than 50 cities across the country, including key information on how to connect with VAC.” The goal is to distribute the poster to 2,000 strategic areas across the country.<sup>42</sup>

To raise awareness among community organizations about the special needs of veterans who are homeless, VAC hosted a Round Table on Homelessness in Ottawa on 7 June 2018. According to Faith McIntyre, the 70 participants “were all identified as subject matter experts in the area of homelessness, particularly focusing on veterans.”<sup>43</sup>

The first outcome of the round table was an [interactive map](#) featuring links to more than 100 agencies able to assist veterans in need. Debbie Lowther of VETS Canada noted that, while she did not mean to criticize VAC's efforts, she felt these initiatives lacked focus. She said that there are very few agencies that are truly able to give veterans who are homeless the help they need, and those organizations are somewhat lost amid the many agencies that provide general support to homeless people:

The interactive map has the Royal Canadian Legion located in Ontario only and VETS Canada located in Halifax only, when we are both national organizations.

My intention here is not to sound critical or negative, but this has become a very crowded landscape and more than anything, veterans who are homeless, like all homeless people, want to receive help from a credible organization that is going to

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41 Mr. Robert Tomljenovic (Area Director, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1555.

42 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

43 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

deliver on what they say they can do. They're not interested in dealing with a connecting agency or a middleman that is just going to refer them to someone else.

We do not naively think that one organization can solve this issue. We realize it takes a collaborative effort, but we also know that a veteran is more likely to accept help from someone who speaks their language, who understands their culture and who can provide immediate support.<sup>44</sup>

However, bringing on board people with similar experiences cannot replace some form of specialized expertise. In other words, simply being a veteran does not necessarily make that person capable of providing adequate assistance to other veterans. Philip Ralph, from Wounded Warriors Canada, explained the balance that is needed between professional expertise and personal empathy for veterans:

[O]n some of our programs, and I'll take COPE as an example, the clinicians aren't necessarily veterans, but they are people who understand uniformed service and trauma. They're some of the best in the country in caring for people. What we have in that group is one couple who have worked through the program and who come back a year later to give that credibility to the clinicians and that language. They become the peer mentors for that group. So you're using the veteran's strength, but then you're tapping into the expertise that is out there in society.

...

You need to take their strengths and surround them with people who are experts and who are supportive from other professions, and use both, so that they can talk to each other and bridge that gap.<sup>45</sup>

Ms. McIntyre acknowledged that veterans prefer organizations that focus on their specific needs. Projects in which veterans can interact with other veterans, while leveraging the skills available from other resources, offer the best chance of success. This approach has been validated by VAC studies to identify best practices in housing for veterans in need:

We did pilot studies on housing models a few years ago with Employment and Social Development Canada in various cities across the country. For the most part, the most successful models were ones that had veterans housed with veterans, where that peer support and that culture was available as part of that housing model.<sup>46</sup>

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44 Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1535.

45 Mr. Philip Ralph (National Program Director, Wounded Warriors Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1640.

46 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1615.



Awareness efforts therefore need to target the many organizations that are likely to interact with veterans in need. These clearly include shelters, whose mission is to care for the homeless, but also the police<sup>47</sup> and many municipal services. These organizations must be made aware of the reality of veterans who are homeless, just as they must be made aware of all the specific issues that can factor into homelessness. The Government of Canada's National Housing Strategy identifies 11 vulnerable populations, including veterans, and each should obviously be the subject of outreach efforts by the departments concerned.

That said, organizations whose core mission (VETS Canada at the national level) or that have as a clearly defined mission helping veterans in need should figure prominently in this complex, diverse environment. Their efforts are presented in the next section of this report, and they should be considered key partners. They could serve as a bridge for VAC's outreach efforts, as they are much better placed than the department to identify local organizations that have the capacity to help veterans who are homeless.

## Case Management for the Homeless

Once at-risk veterans have been identified and have agreed to contact VAC, the department must help restore their trust. Committee members have no doubt that Veterans Service Agents (VSAs) and case managers are acting in the best interests of veterans they wish to help. However, unfavourable conditions may hamper recovery. The testimony heard by the Committee can sometimes be anecdotal and constitute an unfortunate exception to a generally effective larger context. In his testimony, William Webb raised a troubling issue with respect to the turnover of case managers. Mr. Webb said that, after having had a case manager whose services he greatly appreciated, he has had a string of case managers hired on three-month contracts.<sup>48</sup>

In some situations, such employees may be needed because of a temporary shortage of qualified staff, or for some other reason. However, the department should make sure that veterans who are at risk of returning to homelessness are not placed in a situation that, like the one described by Mr. Webb, very clearly hinders a climate of trust between VAC and veterans.

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47 Inspector Colleen Yee (Centralized Operations Services Section, Operations Division, Vancouver Police Department), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1600.

48 Mr. William Webb (As an Individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1620.

## VETERANS AND THE NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Launched in November 2017, the [National Housing Strategy](#) (NHS) is a 10-year project aimed at:

- “cutting chronic homelessness by 50%;
- removing 530,00 families from housing need;
- renovating and modernizing 300,000 homes; and
- building 100,000 new homes.”<sup>49</sup>

Spearheaded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the NHS will provide \$20.5 billion in federal investments over 12 years, cost-matched by the provinces and territories. The NHS has six “priority areas for action”:

- housing for those in greatest need – vulnerable populations;
- social housing sustainability;
- Indigenous housing;
- northern housing;
- sustainable housing and communities; and
- a balanced supply of housing

The first priority area for action, “vulnerable populations.” includes:

- women and children fleeing domestic violence;
- seniors;
- young adults;
- Indigenous peoples;

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49 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, National Housing Strategy, [“What is the strategy?”](#)



- people with disabilities;
- people dealing with mental health and addiction issues;
- veterans;
- LGBTQ2+;
- racialized groups;
- recent immigrants, especially refugees; and
- people experiencing homelessness.

Veterans are therefore one of the 11 vulnerable populations targeted by the first of six priority areas for action. In the wake of the NHS, VAC is currently devising its own strategy to combat homelessness among veterans and coordinate its actions with the CMHC and ESDC.<sup>50</sup> According to Ms. McIntyre, this VAC-specific strategy is in the development stage:

We are working on Coming Home, Veterans Affairs Canada's strategy to prevent and end veteran homelessness. This strategy proposes a number of objectives that will ensure that Canada's veterans who are homeless receive the support they need to achieve housing stability and well-being, and assist in reducing the likelihood of veterans from ever being homeless.<sup>51</sup>

In his testimony, Raymond McInnis from the Royal Canadian Legion criticized the time it is taking to launch this strategy:

In 2016 we were briefed on a VAC homelessness strategy and action plan in the works that would be veteran-centric, evidence informed and outcome based. We were told that it would enable VAC and partners to better find and assist veterans who are homeless and veterans in crisis and prevent veteran homelessness. To date, we have seen no sign of progress.<sup>52</sup>

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50 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1610.

51 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

52 Mr. Raymond McInnis (Director, Veterans Services, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1540.

A key element of the VAC strategy would be a better coordination of projects and programs between the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments. As some witnesses explained, resistance from provinces and municipalities makes it hard to implement projects related to veterans' housing. For example, Executive Director Suzanne Le, from the Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI), said that, "[i]n the case of veterans, there are many provinces, Ontario being one of them, and many cities, Ottawa being one of them, that will not fund projects and programs for veterans of any sort. We are specifically excluded from it because they see it as a federal plan."<sup>53</sup> While her project could have received provincial and municipal funding if it were aimed at homeless people in general, the MHI has had to carry out a major fundraising campaign that will eventually allow it to raise \$5 million for the project.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the fact that one of the conditions for federal funding is the involvement of provincial governments (which usually involves municipalities) creates an additional barrier to the early-stage development of housing projects for veterans.

For its part, the Homes for Heroes Foundation (HHF), founded in 2016, develops projects for veterans in need. Each project features 20 tiny homes that cost about \$125,000 per unit to build.<sup>55</sup> Projects are underway in Calgary and Edmonton. HHF President David Howard argued that this jurisdictional dispute is preventing his organization from undertaking projects:

[M]unicipalities and provinces are saying that they have a lot of homeless vets and that it isn't their problem—that it's Ottawa's problem and it's a federal issue. We're having a difficult time convincing them that they should give us land for this project. It's one of the obstacles we have. We understand that housing for homelessness doesn't fit within the Veterans Affairs mandate, and that is an issue for us. It's difficult for us to get any support on funding if it doesn't fall within their mandate.<sup>56</sup>

To make sure that organizations interested in developing housing projects that address homelessness among veterans receive as much attention as others when they submit their projects to provincial/territorial and municipal authorities, the Committee recommends as follows:

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53 Ms. Suzanne Le (Executive Director, Multifaith Housing Initiative), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1655.

54 Ms. Suzanne Le (Executive Director, Multifaith Housing Initiative), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1640.

55 Mr. David Howard (President, Homes for Heroes Foundation), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1630.

56 Mr. David Howard (President, Homes for Heroes Foundation), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1630.



## Recommendation 8

**That Veterans Affairs Canada, in partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, ensure that housing projects for veterans who are homeless receive specific targeted funding under the National Housing Strategy.**

Growing awareness of veterans who are homeless over the past decade has led to several housing projects for veterans in need. Following in the footsteps of London in 2012, Toronto, London, Calgary and Victoria, in conjunction with the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), VAC and several community organizations, launched a project to develop a Canadian model for housing and support for veterans experiencing homelessness. Western University's Dr. Cheryl Forchuk, a member of the project's steering committee, shared the findings from the evaluation project report with members of the Committee.

As part of this two-year project, 78 veterans were housed in one of 56 units at four sites offering different types of accommodation. The project's principles were as follows:

- focus on veterans helping veterans;
- separate veterans from the general homeless population;
- emphasize promoting self-respect;
- provide a structured environment;
- address addiction;
- focus on the transition process to long-term housing;
- have a core of at least six veterans per site;
- apply a Housing First approach (access to housing is not conditional on participation in a rehabilitation program); and
- apply a harm reduction approach (people in the program do not need to abstain from alcohol or drugs but must respect certain common rules).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *A Canadian Model for Housing and Support of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*, document submitted to the Committee by Dr. Cheryl Forchuk at the meeting of 6 February 2019, p. 8.



The project identified four key areas for consideration for developing housing projects for veterans who are homeless:

- Permanent housing solutions with support must be preferred over transitional housing models.
- Housing First and harm reduction principles must drive programming.
- Housing arrangements must take the specific needs of veterans into account, and better integrate women veterans and families.<sup>58</sup> Evidence-based outcomes must be centred on housing stability with decreased use of emergency services (shelters, police and emergency departments).<sup>59</sup>

This model provided a framework for recent projects, some of which are briefly presented in the following section.

Several witnesses also said that, since housing stability is the best indicator of a person's ability to escape homelessness, a rent supplement would make a major difference in veterans' chances of success. According to Mr. Pearce:

We're making an offer to someone and a leap of faith for people who have been on the streets for a while. If we can offer them some stable funding over a period of time, and I would even argue that for those for whom it's possible, a declining level of funding... For example, the rent subsidy is x dollars one year, x dollars minus \$100 the next year, and then x dollars minus \$100 the following year. Over time, those who can survive in that way reduce their dependency and increase their autonomy.

The horizon for funding, when it's just one-year or two-year funding, just doesn't give us the room to breathe. It doesn't give promise to a homeless person that we're going to be there for them for a sufficiently long period of time. I think extending the horizon is a good investment in stabilizing people outside of homelessness.<sup>60</sup>

Emphasizing that veterans are a priority for the Government of Canada under the National Housing Strategy, the Committee recommends as follows:

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58 For more on this point, see Ms. Cheryl Forchuk (Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Parkwood Institute Research, and Assistant Director, Lawson Health Research Institute), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1535.

59 *A Canadian Model for Housing and Support of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*, document submitted to the Committee by Dr. Cheryl Forchuk at the meeting of 6 February 2019, p. 18.

60 Mr. Matthew Pearce (President and Chief Executive Officer, Old Brewery Mission), *Evidence*, ACVA, 29 November 2018, 1700.



### **Recommendation 9**

**That the Government of Canada create a rent supplement for veterans who are homeless and that this supplement be part of its overall strategy to address homelessness among veterans.**

### **Recommendation 10**

**That the Government of Canada ensure that initiatives dedicated to veterans under the National Housing Strategy are open to veterans with service dogs.**

## **Cockrell House**

Founded in 2009, Cockrell House in Victoria is one of the four organizations involved in developing the Canadian Model for Housing and Support of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness. It is an eight-unit transition house, and therefore does not provide a permanent solution to the housing needs of veterans who are homeless. Other private units or facilities provided by the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion can temporarily accommodate three to five other people. One of the veterans acts as resident manager.

According to Cockrell House Chair Angus Stanfield, when new residents arrive, the first step is matching them with a VAC case manager.<sup>61</sup> The average stay is about one year, but many stay for two, and some for more than two. A limit of three years and then two was initially set, but this was abandoned. Running the facility costs approximately \$1,100 per month per resident.<sup>62</sup> After the first few months each individual's situation is assessed, and they are encouraged to contribute between \$200 and \$500 a month, depending on their income.

Cockrell House does not receive any government financial support. But, as Mr. Stanfield notes, "Without the Royal Canadian Legion we couldn't survive."<sup>63</sup>

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61 Mr. Angus Stanfield (Chair, Cockrell House, South Mid-Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1540.

62 Mr. Angus Stanfield (Chair, Cockrell House, South Mid-Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1545.

63 Mr. Angus Stanfield (Chair, Cockrell House, South Mid-Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1550.

## Multifaith Housing Initiative

While Cockrell House has been running a transition house for veterans for the past decade, the Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI) plans to start the construction phase of its project in 2019. MHI has been a registered charity in Ottawa since 2002, providing housing and support for individuals and families who are homeless. Founded by the Archdiocese of Ottawa, the organization already has housing for the homeless, but it wanted to develop a project for veterans. It relies on a pool of volunteers from approximately 70 faith groups in the region, but it has no religious or affiliation requirements for its tenants.<sup>64</sup>

MHI Executive Director Suzanne Le said the affordable housing for veterans project is taking a Housing First approach. The goal is to build 40 supportive housing units with access to integrated mental health and addiction management support services. The project will be built on the former Rockcliffe air base in east Ottawa, which has been declared “surplus federal real property” by the Department of National Defence, and which, under an Employment and Social Development Canada program, is available for homelessness initiatives.<sup>65</sup> The project will be carried out in partnership with Salus Ottawa, Veterans Affairs Canada, Soldiers Helping Soldiers, the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command and District G, True Patriot Love, the Canadian Forces Moral and Welfare Services, Support Our Troops and Helmets to Hardhats.

As discussed above, jurisdictional issues may impede the public funding of projects for veterans. That is why MHI has been forced to conduct a major fundraising campaign that will ultimately allow the project to proceed. While this shows that such projects can be carried out with limited financial support from public authorities, the bigger challenge is that these funding difficulties are directly linked to the fact that the project is veteran-specific, which tends to cause provincial and municipal authorities to step back.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

This section presents some of the initiatives undertaken by community-based organizations that help veterans who are homeless and that the Committee was able to meet as part of its study. These organizations have often been able to expand the scope of successful local and regional initiatives by attracting the support of VAC, the Royal Canadian Legion or other funding agencies.

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64 Ms. Suzanne Le (Executive Director, Multifaith Housing Initiative), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1710.

65 Ms. Suzanne Le (Executive Director, Multifaith Housing Initiative), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1640.



## VETS Canada

VETS Canada began in 2010 in Halifax as a peer support initiative to help veterans who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Its activities grew rapidly and, in 2014, the organization signed an agreement with VAC and became an official service provider for homeless and in-crisis veterans. There are now “regional operations managers” in each province.

Each year, VETS Canada organizes a tour during which hundreds of volunteers walk the streets of Canada’s major cities to identify homeless people in need and refer them to appropriate services. It provides emergency transition housing in Halifax, Vancouver and Ottawa, and recently opened a drop-in and support centre in Ottawa. VETS Canada recently launched the Captain Nichola Goddard Support Initiative for Female Veterans in Crisis, funded by the True Patriot Love Foundation. One of its first tasks is to develop a guide for supporting homeless and in-crisis women veterans.

According to VETS Canada Chair and Co-founder Debbie Lowther, the organization receives between 200 and 300 requests for assistance each month across the country:

Those requests come to us in a variety of ways, through our 1-888 phone line, our website or social media platforms, and most recently through our newly opened veterans drop-in and support centre here in Ottawa as well as our recently announced veterans support centre in Edmonton. Some of those referrals are from other organizations or agencies. Approximately half of our referrals each month come from Veterans Affairs Canada case managers.<sup>66</sup>

With the introduction of the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund (VFWBF) on 1 April 2018, VAC no longer recognizes VETS Canada as a specialized service provider, but rather as one of many organizations eligible for funding under the VFWBF. According to Ms. Lowther, VETS Canada received the same funding from VAC as the previous year, but she is concerned that the proliferation of organizations will scatter funding, diluting the ability of proven organizations to continue to provide the same level of service.<sup>67</sup>

Of the 155 organizations that applied, 21 shared a total of \$3 million in assistance. Of these 21 organizations, three have activities directed at supporting veterans who are homeless: VETS Canada, the RESPECT Campaign and the Old Brewery Mission.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1530.

67 Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1530.

68 Ms. Faith McIntyre (Director General, Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 20 November 2018, 1540.

## Royal Canadian Legion

Through its [Leave the Streets Behind](#) program, the Royal Canadian Legion (RCL) provides financial assistance to homeless and at-risk veterans, as well as emergency housing. It partners with VETS Canada and other organizations, such as [Soldiers Helping Soldiers](#), to help veterans who may be in need. Because of its poppy campaign, the RCL does not have to depend on taxpayer funds for its activities. As a result, it has not received any funding under the VFWBF.

The Leave the Streets Behind program was launched by the RCL's Ontario Command in 2009. Thanks to initial funding of \$500,000 in 2012, the program was expanded across the country so that each provincial command can develop a support program for veterans who are homeless. In total, more than \$2 million has been disbursed through its activities.<sup>69</sup> Raymond McInnis, with the RCL's Dominion Command, gave some examples of initiatives made possible by this funding:

[The Ontario Command] has a partnership with Mainstay Housing in Toronto and are supporting three locations in Toronto: Parliament Street, Bathurst Street and 10 apartments in the Pan Am village. To date, Ontario Command has assisted 667 veterans who are homeless in 139 communities in Ontario, and that includes 62 female veterans who are homeless.

B.C./Yukon Command provides financial support for Veterans Manor in Vancouver's east side and for Cockrell House in Victoria, a transition house that is presently full. There are nine rooms there, and they are constantly full.

Alberta/Northwest Territories Command operated a food bank for over 20 years and today works directly with the Calgary Food Bank to assist many veterans in the community. The command is also engaged with first responders, social services and Veterans Affairs Canada in identifying and assisting veterans who are homeless. Although they do not keep detailed statistics, their estimate for providing emergency shelter for veterans in the past three years would be over 60 veterans and families. The number of veterans who they have helped with rent to ensure they do not become homeless would be more than double that number.

Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command launched the veterans outreach program, bringing together community resources and establishing partnerships to provide proactive assistance to veterans who are homeless.<sup>70</sup>

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69 Mr. Raymond McInnis (Director, Veterans Services, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1540.

70 Mr. Raymond McInnis (Director, Veterans Services, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, ACVA, 22 November 2018, 1535-40.



There is no substitute for the national network the RCL has developed over the past century, which allows it to coordinate assistance at the local level. It is therefore difficult to consider a comprehensive plan to address homelessness among veterans that does not actively involve the RCL.

## Wounded Warriors Canada

Founded in the late 2000s, Wounded Warriors Canada (WWC) has taken a progressive approach to its interventions by filling gaps that the organization had identified while avoiding duplication. This has led the WWC to focus on mental health over the past six years. This year, the organization will invest \$3.2 million in its overall programming.<sup>71</sup> In keeping with the WWC's spirit of working together, it has partnered with VETS Canada to expand its program, rather than launch a new program aimed at veterans who are homeless.

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

### Soldiers Helping Soldiers

Soldiers Helping Soldiers (SHS) has been in Ottawa for six years. It incorporated as a not-for-profit in 2017.<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant-General (Retired) Stuart Beare, Chair of the Board, described SHS as follows:

We are an organization of volunteers that aids in recognizing and connecting with veterans on the street. We identify them. We connect with them. I loved Cheryl's description of how that cultural and military reconnection is so important to so many. We connect with them on a personal level and then facilitate their connection and interconnectedness with those who can help them. It's very much that "walking beside" mission as opposed to "delivering the service" mission, and allowing those who are experts at delivering the services to be accessible to them so they can get the services they require. Fundamentally that's who we are and what we seek to do.

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71 Mr. Philip Ralph (National Program Director, Wounded Warriors Canada), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1545.

72 Lieutenant-General (Retired) Stuart Beare (Chair of the Board, Soldiers Helping Soldiers), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1550.

It's all volunteer work, including by serving members of the Canadian Forces who have permission to work with us as volunteers in uniform, helping to bring the uniform into that ecosystem.<sup>73</sup>

## Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund

Founded in 1942, the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF) provides distress loans, grants and bursaries to Royal Canadian Navy veterans and their dependants. In 2018, it provided nearly \$600,000 in various programs to 237 people.<sup>74</sup> One of these programs is emergency assistance, accounting for 15% to 20% of total expenditures. This emergency assistance provides up to a maximum of \$1,000 per person and is similar to the Veterans Emergency Fund. RCNBF President Robert Cl  roux said that these requests are usually intended to complement assistance provided by VAC, VETS Canada or the Royal Canadian Legion. The fund provided just over 100 grants last year.

## RESPECT Campaign

The RESPECT Campaign is a multi-organizational networking initiative to support retired first responder veterans. Founder Stephen Gregory said the project began in Montr  al and, with funding from the VFWBF, has been expanded to 19 cities across Canada.<sup>75</sup> One of the goals of these collaborative meetings is to create a map identifying local organizations that can provide services to veterans.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Homelessness is a complex issue whose solution requires numerous, coordinated interventions—both major, nationwide ones and concrete, local ones. In the case of veterans, given the targeted nature of the interventions that can be carried out, it should be possible to implement a program that eliminates veterans' homelessness. That is the main recommendation of this report.

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73 Lieutenant-General (Retired) Stuart Beare (Chair of the Board, Soldiers Helping Soldiers), *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 February 2019, 1550.

74 Mr. Robert Cl  roux (President, Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 November 2018, 1635.

75 Mr. Stephen Gregory (Cofounder, RESPECT Campaign), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1600.

76 Ms. Brenda Fewster (National Director, University Outreach and Program Evaluation, RESPECT Campaign), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 February 2019, 1630.



There are probably between 3,000 and 5,000 veterans who are homeless or at high risk of homelessness in Canada. Veterans are an extremely diverse group, and a one-size-fits-all model would not meet all their needs. Local, individual solutions involving housing stability are needed. This is the stated principle of Housing First, which centres on finding a stable housing solution before addressing any other problem that may have contributed to the person spiralling into homelessness.

Veterans are an at-risk population under the National Housing Strategy. This provides unparalleled funding leverage for a national coordination of initiatives to end veterans' homelessness. Veterans Affairs Canada has a key role to play as a bridge between local organizations working with individual veterans in need and the federal programs that best suit their needs. The Committee therefore eagerly awaits the launch of the department's homelessness strategy, which has been planned for some years now.

Community organizations whose expertise and national reach have already produced remarkable results must also be recognized as key partners in this strategy. VETS Canada has contributed more than any other organization to raising national awareness about veterans' homelessness. The Royal Canadian Legion, with its nationwide network, is simply irreplaceable in terms of translating national objectives to the local level.

Finally, in each community, people from all walks of life recognize the immense dedication of veterans and are ready to help them out at the slightest sign of concerted action by public officials, at all levels of government, appealing for their support. The time is ripe for the Government of Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, all municipalities, dozens of community organizations, the generosity of the private sector and the sincere desire of Canadians, to recognize the contribution of veterans to Canada's national identity and make homelessness among veterans a thing of the past.



## APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b>Department of Veterans Affairs</b> Faith McIntyre, Director General Policy and Research Division, Strategic Policy and Commemoration Robert Tomljenovic, Area Director	2018/11/20	99
<b>Royal Canadian Legion</b> Dave Gordon, Homeless Veterans Representative Dominion Command Raymond McInnis, Director Veterans Services, Dominion Command	2018/11/22	100
<b>VETS Canada</b> Debbie Lowther, Chair and Co-founder	2018/11/22	100
<b>As an individual</b> Aaron Segart	2018/11/27	101
<b>Multifaith Housing Initiative</b> Suzanne Le, Executive Director	2018/11/27	101
<b>Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund</b> Robert Cl��roux, President Tom Riefesel, Vice-President	2018/11/27	101
<b>South Mid Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society</b> Angus Stanfield, Chairman Cockrell House	2018/11/27	101
<b>Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness</b> Tim Richter, President and Chief Executive Officer	2018/11/29	102

<b>Organizations and Individuals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>
<b>Homes for Heroes Foundation</b> David Howard, President	2018/11/29	102
<b>Old Brewery Mission</b> Matthew Pearce, President and Chief Executive Officer	2018/11/29	102
<b>Vancouver Police Department</b> Cst Alyson Smith, Homeless Outreach Coordinator Centralized Operations Services Section Insp Colleen Yee, Centralized Operations Services Section, Operations Division	2018/11/29	102
<b>As an individual</b> William Webb	2019/02/04	106
<b>RCMP Veterans' Association</b> Ralph Mahar, Executive Officer	2019/02/04	106
<b>Respect Campaign</b> Brenda Fewster, National Director University Outreach and Program Evaluation Stephen Gregory, Cofounder	2019/02/04	106
<b>Lawson Health Research Institute</b> Cheryl Forchuk, Assistant Director, and Beryl and Richard Ivey Research Chair in Aging, Mental Health, Rehabilitation and Recovery Parkwood Institute Research	2019/02/06	107
<b>Soldiers Helping Soldiers</b> LGen (Ret'd) Stuart Beare, Chair of the Board	2019/02/06	107
<b>Wounded Warriors Canada</b> Capt(N) (Ret'd) Philip Ralph, National Program Director	2019/02/06	107

## REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 99 to 102, 106, 107, and 114](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Neil R. Ellis  
Chair

