

December 22, 2023

To the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA),

With this month's Cabinet approval of Canada's third National Action Plan (CNAP3) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) has become the newest departmental signatory.

The Women, Peace, and Security Network of Canada (WPSN-C) welcomes VAC to the larger WPS community with anticipation and appreciation of the department's new support commitment to the WPS agenda. VAC's new CNAP3 Implementation Plan is an exciting opportunity to both review and update department research priorities, policies, programs, and services through a WPS domestic agenda lens. VAC's evergreen CNAP3 Implementation Plan ensures continued work towards the meaningful inclusion of the lived experiences and needs unique to the women Veterans that have served Canada in the WPS sector.

As ACVA winds up its "Experience of Women Veterans" study, members of the WPSN-C offer three domestic WPS agenda related recommendations for committee consideration for inclusion as study recommendations.

1. VAC develop and resource an internal WPS capacity building plan.

Given that VAC is a new CNAP3 signatory department, WPSN-C recommends internal capacity building be priority initiated. Suggestions include the provision of dedicated and WPS specific trained staff with the budgets and resources required to enable their work mandates.

General/whole-of-department: The Department's new engagement in the CNAP3, and the implications of this, should be broadly socialized among all VAC staff. This could include the engagement of consultants to deliver in-house training, informal "brown bag" educational sessions with WPS community members including WPSN-C members and women Veterans with lived WPS experiences. Ideally VAC staff would have access to WPS related communities of practice for both formal and informal dissemination of WPS related learning and exchange opportunities. Furthermore, the department's WPS agenda ideally would be implemented internally in a manner that will allow it to have cross cutting influences throughout .

Specific/Subject matter expertise: While some Department staff likely do already have subject matter expertise on related topics such as gender equality, women's health, and gender-based analysis plus - sufficient resources should still be allocated to engage WPS specific subject matter experts (SME). In addition, other SMEs supporting the development of related policies and programs, or delivery of services should be provided with WPS professional development opportunities, such as external training/higher education on WPS.

2. VAC develop and resource a Women Veteran research agenda inclusive of WPS.

At present, limited data is available to the Department on the experience of women Veterans at large, and specifically on the experience of those who have deployed abroad on United Nations peacekeeping or stabilization missions. VAC should develop and resource a research agenda to better understand the unique needs and priorities of this group. In addition, other research initiatives on the experience of Veterans should be disaggregated by sex, gender, location of service, and type of mission to enable more fulsome analysis to inform the Department's WPS-related policies, programs, and services. This should be initiated immediately, if not already in place.

3. VAC develop and formalize its new WPS-related policies, programs and services with the meaningful inclusion of external voices including, but not limited to - other government departments, civil society and women Veterans.

VAC should continue to strengthen all opportunities to consult with women Veterans on existing policies and programs. More importantly, however, it should formalize processes to facilitate meaningful collaboration with women Veterans in the co-conceptualization and co-development of policies, programs, and services. It is only by engaging women Veterans at this early stage of the process that VAC can ensure that policies, programs, and services are truly informed by and reflective of women Veterans' diverse experiences, priorities and needs. Roles and responsibilities within relevant existing structures could include:

a. *Whole of Government Approach:* VAC should actively participate in all cross-departmental WPS activities including specifically with RCMP, Public Safety,, and Department of National Defence (DND) and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

b. *DND/CAF/VAC Joint Steering Committee Collaboration:* The exchange of information between DND/CAF/VAC on WPS issues should be strengthened. Joint research initiatives should be undertaken to best understand how the in-service experience of women deployed internationally on peace and stabilization missions impacts their support requirements from VAC once they leave service. WPS should be included as a standing agenda item along with women Veterans on the Joint CAF/VAC Steering Committee. A WPS related briefing should be provided to the Steering Committee to enable them to understand WPS and its applicability to their work and role as a whole.

c. *Women Veterans' Council (WVC):* The newly-formed Women Veterans' Council represents an opportunity to institutionalize reflection, analysis, and planning related to the WPS agenda in collaboration with women Veterans. The Terms of Reference of the WVC should explicitly articulate the role of this body in the co-creation of the policies, programs, and services identified within VAC's CNAP3 implementation plan. This group should be empowered to meaningfully contribute their expertise to the Department in this regard, including engagement in CNAP3 reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. Ideally this council would answer to the DND/CAF/VAC Joint Steering Committee if not directly to the Minister.

d. *VAC Advisory Groups:* VAC has established six Advisory Groups focused on specific topics of interest. The co-chairs of each of these groups should be briefed on WPS issues and responsibilities in general and how they relate to the Advisory Group agenda. The

fulfillment of the WPS agenda should be included in the Terms of References and agendas of each of these groups.

In summary, the WPSN-C wishes to thank the committee ahead of time for its consideration to include WPS related recommendations into the “The Experience of Women Veterans” report.

In case not already aware, we would like to highlight a 2021 WPSN-C document available at <https://wpsn-canada.org/2021/03/30/reflections-on-canadas-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-gains-gaps-goals> that provides more background on the Canadian domestic WPS agenda.

Members of the WPSN-C would be happy to meet or provide more information as required to the committee on these topics and recommendations. However, as I will soon be on maternity leave, please forward any follow-up questions or concerns to the Chair of the WPSN-Canada Beth Woroniuk who can be contacted at coordinator@wpsn-canada.org

Season’s Greetings,

Laura Sewell

On behalf of the WPSN-Canada subcommittee on VAC’s WPS Implementation Plan