

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE TITLED: *PROVIDING AID TO THE CIVIL POWER: DISASTER RELIEF AND THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES' DOMESTIC OPERATIONS*

Introduction

The Government of Canada has considered the report of the Standing Committee on National Defence and thanks its members for their study and recommendations.

The Government also recognizes that a sustainable approach for a pan-Canadian civilian response capacity is needed to keep pace with the evolving threat environment. In February 2024, the Government of Canada launched a targeted engagement process with a broad range of emergency management partners and stakeholders to help inform options on what a pan-Canadian civilian response capacity model could look like. Through this engagement, the Government of Canada is working to better understand current capacities, gaps and limitations within the emergency response system and gather insights and views on ways to more efficiently leverage existing capacities through a future, all-hazards pan-Canadian civilian response capacity. A civilian response model can provide a predictable, whole-of-society workforce across emergency management partners, capable of providing surge support for a range of emergency events and provide relief to Canadians in times of need.

The Government of Canada welcomes the recommendations made in this report. The majority of the Committee's recommendations are aligned with ongoing work undertaken by various federal departments and agencies.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada address issues relating to the current recruitment and retention crisis to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces is able to fulfill their responsibility to provide aid to civil power when requested.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

Rebuilding the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is one of the Department of National Defence (DND)/CAF's utmost priorities, as it will ensure that the CAF has the capacity to fulfill its core missions, including its responsibility to provide aid to civil power when required. As outlined in the recent defence policy update, *Our North Strong and Free* (ONSAF), DND/CAF will implement modern recruitment measures that can help fill the gap between the authorized and actual size of the CAF and build a more supportive and inclusive culture to improve retention.

First, DND/CAF is taking steps to modernize CAF recruitment processes to rebuild the military by 2032. Current efforts are focused on using digital technology to improve the applicant experience, speeding up required screenings, and connecting with new pools of applicants. Moreover, the CAF is also modernizing training by optimizing new members' transition into service, streamlining training activities, and providing new recruits with meaningful work more quickly and effectively. For example, the Royal Canadian Navy has launched an innovative, one-year trial programs to attract recruits without requiring a long-term commitment and has streamlined the intake period for a prospective sailor from months to weeks.

DND/CAF will also take urgent measures to ensure it retains current military members. Despite important improvements, the underlying personnel system still requires structural reforms to reflect today's realities, including changes to military personnel policy, digitalization, competitive compensation and benefits package, and identifying new approaches to position the military as an employer of choice. To retain existing members and attract new ones, DND/CAF will explore ways to reform how it manages military personnel, granting members increased career control and flexibility while enhancing performance management and succession planning. As it continues to remove barriers to deployment, retention, and career progression in the military, the CAF will also explore ways to improve career support for military members through upgraded administrative processes and improved service delivery that is enabled by digital tools.

DND/CAF is also examining possible adjustments to personnel policies related to compensation and benefits, human resource policies, leave, and other supports for work-life balance for those in uniform. The current framework was put in place decades ago and does not always address the expectations and realities of today's members.

In addition, the Government is developing a CAF Housing Strategy to rehabilitate existing housing and build new housing so that military members can afford to live where they and their families are posted and has already taken bold action to improve access to housing for all Canadians, and will do the same for the members of the CAF and their families.

To improve the quality of life of CAF members, DND/CAF is accelerating the development of an electronic health record platform that improves the continuity of care in mental and physical health services for the diverse needs of members as they move between provinces and territories.

Finally, DND/CAF will invest in additional supports for military families, including by investing in affordable childcare. Military service often demands frequent moves and deployments, making quality childcare more than just a convenience. To support our military families, Canada will provide members with better access to childcare at bases across the country. This is an essential support to members' ability to serve and the well-being of their families.

These investments will ensure that the CAF recognizes and rewards military members and their families for the sacrifices that they make in the service of Canadians, which will in turn lead to a more diverse, efficient and operationally effective military.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada create a database, in line with the Privacy Act, of volunteers based upon their profession and experience with the specific purpose to call up to volunteer efficiently to assist with disaster response operations.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada undertook a public consultation related to a sustainable model for a pan-Canadian civilian response capacity. As part of this engagement, Public Safety Canada (PS) is exploring how volunteers and civilian groups can be strategically leveraged in emergency response, and the means through which these groups could be organized and coordinated to support disaster events.

Since 2021, PS has been providing funding through the Humanitarian Workforce (HWF) program to enable humanitarian non-governmental organizations in Canada to build capacity to respond to all-hazard events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters, such as floods and wildfires.

This dedicated funding includes capacity-building funds to support eligible Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in building on their recruitment, training, equipment and organizational readiness to allow them to rapidly deploy on short notice for emergency response.

This funding has helped Canada's NGOs develop highly skilled and qualified group of volunteer emergency responders and emergency management professionals who can rapidly deploy on short notice to support the response to emergency events. Additionally, this funding enabled them to recruit and train response teams, purchase equipment and supplies, strengthen governance, and adapt their protocols and procedures to address the needs of specific communities, including vulnerable populations.

Volunteers, whether they are organized via civilian response groups or spontaneous volunteers who choose to contribute during an event, are a vital component of Emergency Management (EM) in Canada due to their local knowledge, rapid response capabilities, cost-effectiveness, diverse skills, and role in building community resilience. The Government of Canada, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments, acknowledges the contributions of EM volunteers through the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award, which is a prestigious recognition for exceptional service and achievement for work being done across

Canada to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters. Budget 2024 further demonstrated the Government's recognition of EM volunteers by doubling the Volunteer Firefighters Tax Credit and the Search and Rescue Volunteers Tax Credit.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada undertake a comprehensive study of establishing a civilian corps of engineers in the Canadian Armed Forces, with a structure and mission similar to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and a mixed body of planning and coordination specialists.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada has recently undertaken, and continues to work on, a variety of initiatives that will bolster Canada's planning and coordinating capacity in the context of disaster response. These efforts have included a review of several approaches to civilian response that exist in other countries, including the U.S. However, the initiatives being explored are adapted to the Canadian context as they consider Canada's national capacities, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of each federal, civilian, and provincial and territorial organizations, with the aim of increasing civilian – as opposed to military – emergency management capabilities across the country.

For example, since 2021, the HWF program has aimed to build a scalable civilian workforce that can be rapidly deployed in emergencies, broadening the resources available to respond to human-induced and climate-related disasters in Canada, and reducing the reliance on the CAF in disaster response. The program funds NGOs that possess specialized skills and expertise to respond to a variety of events that could initiate Requests for Federal Assistance from provincial and territorial governments. These specialized skills can include engineering, planning, and coordination expertise. Ultimately, the program aims to enhance Canada's EM capabilities and capacity outside of the CAF to reduce the impact of large-scale emergencies on Canadians.

In addition, the Government of Canada is also undertaking a broader consultation with the provinces and territories, Indigenous partners, and stakeholders on the need for a more comprehensive civilian response capacity. This engagement will help inform decisions concerning an integrated and sustainable approach for all-hazards civilian response. Through this work, the Government has also engaged other countries to gain insights from a wide range of models for civilian response. This included the U.S., New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. While their approaches vary, many of these nations either maintain their own civilian response surge capabilities or fund organizations that can be rapidly deployed to provide surge support. For example, the U.S. maintains a large variety of deployable capabilities, including in the form of full-time employees, reservists, volunteers and a youth corps. New Zealand oversees a national surge response capability which can be deployed for up to 14 days, while Australia funds a veteran-led organization and is also currently examining the possibility of a deployable civilian capability.

While engineering, planning, and coordination are vital specialties in the field of emergency management, it is important to consider Canada's national capabilities and capacities in their entirety. That is why in May 2023, the Government of Canada released the National Risk Profile, Canada's first strategic, national-level risk and capability assessment. The National Risk Profile uses scientific evidence and stakeholder input to create a forward-looking picture of Canada's disaster risks and capabilities to strengthen Canadian communities' resilience to disasters. Overall, the National Risk Profile's risk and capability assessments help inform how Canada can enhance resilience. The evidence gathered through the development of this tool provides a foundation to support a variety of existing and future EM initiatives. It is a tool that will help integrate climate change adaptation into emergency management and inform decisions and investments that support overall national resilience.

The Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, stakeholders, and provinces and territories will continue to examine how best to increase civilian emergency management capabilities across the country.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada take comprehensive steps to work with provinces and territories to establish a national standardized curriculum, including standardized core capabilities and competencies that can be recognized at the national level and accreditation for emergency management programs taught at post-secondary institutions.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

In Canada, Emergency Management is a shared responsibility, and Provinces and territories hold responsibility for EM within their respective jurisdictions.

Establishing a standardized national curriculum could present clear benefits in enhancing the interoperability between federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal EM workforces who are often called upon to work together on across the country short notice. The Government of Canada is examining the recommendation to establish a national standardized curriculum for emergency management.

The Government has taken important steps to bolster coordination with provincial and territorial governments, support for training programs, and the implementation of systems like the National Emergency Response System (NERS) and the Federal Emergency Response Plan (FERP). Future plans could include activities such as developing a standardized curriculum based on the Canadian Core Capabilities List (CCCL), establishing accreditation programs, and maintaining continuous collaboration to ensure the curriculum's effectiveness. These efforts align with the overarching goals outlined in the *Emergency Management Framework for Canada* and the *Emergency Management Strategy for Canada: Toward a Resilient 2030* (EMS).

Several federal initiatives have been put in place to ensure a coordinated response to domestic emergencies.

PS, as part of its EM leadership and coordination role, facilitates collaboration with provincial and territorial governments through frameworks such as the *Emergency Management Framework for Canada*. This framework integrates risk-based measures and emphasizes collaboration across all levels of government to ensure coherent action in EM.

PS also has an important role to play in ensuring the development of standardized core competency development nation-wide. As such, PS supports a variety of training programs that aim to build standardized core capabilities. For example, the Government Operations Centre (GOC) National Exercise Program strengthens emergency management capabilities and capacity across all jurisdictions and functions. All levels of government, first responders, non-government and Indigenous organizations, as well as military officials work together to develop and deliver exercises. Exercises simulate emergency scenarios such as natural disasters, health threats and terrorist attacks to validate response plans and training, and identify areas for improvement. These programs ensure that EM professionals across Canada are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to disasters effectively. This is part of the broader strategy to build resilient communities as outlined in the EMS. Furthermore, the NERS establishes standardized processes and terminology to facilitate effective emergency response coordination between federal, provincial, and territorial governments. This system supports the training and operational consistency necessary for a standardized curriculum.

The GOC provides an integrated federal response to all-hazards events. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that federal actions are coordinated with PT efforts, thus supporting the development and implementation of standardized training protocols. The FERP outlines the responsibilities of federal departments in EM, ensuring that federal EM plans align with national standards. This alignment supports the creation of a nation-wide standardized curriculum and competencies recognized at the national level.

The National Risk Profile aims to help Canadians understand the risks they face in order to prepare for, manage, and recover from emergencies, provide all emergency management partners the information they need to make decisions to reduce, prepare for, and respond to disasters; and identify the strengths and weaknesses at the national level to help reduce the

impacts of disasters for everyone in Canada.

The Canadian Core Capabilities List (CCCL, co-created by federal, provincial and territorial governments to support capability-based planning for EM) provides a standardized set of EM capabilities that all jurisdictions should possess to increase effectiveness across all 4 EM pillars. These capabilities may form the basis of a national curriculum, ensuring that all training programs focus on building these essential skills. The CCCL includes capabilities related to prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery, ensuring comprehensive training for all hazards.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada prioritize the efforts to increase disaster response and emergency preparedness exercises between relevant federal departments and agencies and provincial and local authorities, including relevant civilian and non-governmental organizations.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is examining efforts to increase disaster response and emergency preparedness exercises. Through the GOC National Exercise Program, Emergency Management Planning Guide, and comprehensive training programs, PS ensures that all relevant federal departments, agencies, provincial and local authorities, as well as NGOs, are well-prepared to respond to various emergencies. These initiatives enhance coordination, validate response plans, and continuously improve EM capabilities across Canada, reducing reliance on the CAF as a last resort.

The GOC leads major national and international exercises that include broad societal organizations. This program involves designing and delivering exercises that simulate a wide range of emergency scenarios, such as natural disasters, health threats, and terrorist attacks. The exercises aim to validate response plans, training, and coordination among various stakeholders, including federal, provincial, and local authorities, as well as NGOs and Indigenous communities. A notable example is the Exercise Coastal Response 2023, which focused on an earthquake scenario and involved multiple levels of government and other organizations to test operational capabilities and improve preparedness.

To support best practices and national alignment in EM planning, PS provides a comprehensive Emergency Management Planning Guide, which includes methodologies for developing, implementing, and maintaining strategic emergency management plans. These plans integrate and coordinate EM activities, ensuring a cohesive approach to disaster preparedness and response across various government institutions. The guide emphasizes the importance of after-action reports and continuous improvement processes to enhance future exercises and response efforts.

This year, the Government of Canada worked with the Province of British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and local authorities and organisations to launch a pilot initiative to bolster emergency response capabilities through the Humanitarian Workforce Program. This initiative will provide a wider range of emergency response options and the ability to rapidly mobilize and deploy support to Canadians in need.

PS also play a leadership role regarding EM training through partnerships with institutions, including the Canada School of Public Service. Most EM training is operationally specific. PS is working with other partners to standardize core training aligned on the Incident Command System, an internationally recognized standard. This promotes common approaches to emergency management, adoption of best practices, and enhancement of capabilities across all regions.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada work with provinces and territories to invest in their emergency management, disaster mitigation and response assistance to ensure they only rely on the Canadian Armed Forces as a last resort.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada has in place a comprehensive suite of programs and initiatives, described below, to support a robust and resilient EM ecosystem in Canada and is examining how best to enhance these programs. These efforts aim to build a robust EM system that reduces reliance on the CAF and ensures a resilient response to disasters across Canada. The current comprehensive approach includes financial assistance, public alerting, advanced communication systems, and mitigation and adaptation initiatives. These initiatives collectively enhance community resilience, improve EM capacities, and support proactive disaster mitigation efforts across Canada.

The Government also recognizes that provincial, territorial and municipal EM capacity needs to be further bolstered in order to reduce reliance on the CAF in its capacity as a force of last resort.

Public Safety Canada

The Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements program provides financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments when response and recovery costs exceed their capacity. It aims to support the restoration of public infrastructure and essential services, while also allowing for mitigation activities to reduce future disaster vulnerability.

National Public Alerting System (NPAS): The NPAS ensures that timely and accurate alerts are disseminated to the public during emergencies. This system enhances community preparedness and response capabilities.

“Flood Insurance and Mitigation: PS is working on a proposal for a Flood Insurance Affordability Program, that would make flood insurance more accessible and affordable. In addition, the Flood Risk Portal would provide critical information on flood hazards, helping communities to better prepare and mitigate flood risks.” Search and Rescue Initiatives: Programs like the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund and Heavy Urban Search and Rescue support advanced training, equipment, and operations for search and rescue teams, enhancing their effectiveness during disasters.

Emergency Management Framework: The Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Emergency Management Framework promotes collaboration and coordination across all levels of government for effective disaster response and mitigation.

The GOC continues to work with provincial and territorial partners both ahead of and during emergency events pending potential requests for assistance. A full review of the RFA process was recently completed, and the HWF programming and the role of NGOs are being maximized by the GOC in order to respond to events and grow overall capacity.

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada

Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF): This program supports Canadian communities to better prepare for and withstand future climate change impacts and natural disasters, including droughts and floods; prevent infrastructure failures; and protect people across Canada. The DMAF encourages communities to submit project proposals that best address the natural hazard risk for their community and welcomes the highest adoption of guidelines, codes and standards.

Natural Infrastructure Fund: This program increases the use of natural and hybrid infrastructure throughout Canada – recognizing the value of green and blue spaces and the effectiveness of natural infrastructure solutions in building climate resiliency. Eligible projects include restoring wetlands, planting trees, and creating green spaces that absorb excess water during floods, thereby reducing the impact of extreme rainfall and enhancing community resilience.

Climate Resilient Built Environment Initiative, and Standards to Support Resilience in Infrastructure Program: These programs, respectively delivered by the National Research Council and the Standards Council of Canada, advance the integration of climate resilience into national guidelines, standards and codes, and develop future-climate design data in priority

areas, such as flooding, extreme heat, and nature-based solutions.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

Canadian Centre for Climate Services (CCCS): The CCCS provides high-resolution climate data, information, and tools to help communities understand and manage climate risks. This service supports communities in considering climate change for informed decision-making to bolster their resilience to climate risks, which may contribute to reduced dependency on emergency responses that involve the CAF.

National Environmental Emergencies Centre: This Centre coordinates responses to environmental emergencies, including spills and wildlife diseases. It provides crucial support during environmental disasters, ensuring rapid and effective mitigation efforts that prevent escalation and reduce the need for CAF involvement.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)

Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program: This program enhances the understanding of flood risks through updated flood maps, helping communities to better prepare and mitigate flood risks. Accurate flood mapping is essential for planning and implementing effective flood defenses, thereby reducing the impact of floods and the need for military assistance.

Canadian Wildland Fire Information System: This system offers tools and data for wildfire management, helping communities prepare for and respond to wildfires more effectively. By providing real-time information and predictive tools, this program supports proactive wildfire management and reduces the need for CAF deployment during wildfire events.

Wildfire Resilient Futures Initiative (WRFI): The WRFI is part of *Canada's National Adaptation Strategy*. It supports activities to enhance proactivity, reduce risk, and increase resilience to transform the way Canada manages wildland fire. This initiative is designed to mobilize and bring together all orders of government, Indigenous peoples, public and private sectors, academia and individuals to participate and coordinate efforts to effectively live safely within wildland fire prone areas.

Fighting and Managing Wildfire in a Changing Climate (FMWCC): The FMWCC initiative responds to needs identified by provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners. This initiative has two funds and is helping to rebuild Canada's supply of wildland firefighting equipment and a new cadre of wildland firefighters to support response operations. The FMWCC-Training Fund aims to train 1,000 new community-based firefighters, to reduce the risk from wildfire and support community-based capacity. The FMWCC-Equipment Fund supports provinces and territories in strengthening their capacities and capabilities in fire management across Canada through the procurement of specialized wildland firefighting equipment.

NRCan also works with provinces and territories through the federal-provincial-territorial Canadian Council of Forest Ministers as well as the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC). CIFFC is owned and operated by federal, provincial, and territorial wildland fire management agencies to coordinate resource sharing, mutual aid and information sharing. CIFFC operates as a facilitator of wildland fire cooperation and coordination nationally and internationally.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)

First Nations Adapt Program (FNAP): This CIRNAC program enhances the resilience of First Nations communities to climate impacts. It supports projects that address specific climate-related vulnerabilities, such as flooding and coastal erosion, helping communities adapt and reduce their reliance on emergency responses that may involve the CAF.

Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP): The EMAP supports First Nation communities in managing emergencies, including funding for preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery activities. This program strengthens the emergency management

capabilities of First Nation communities, reducing the necessity for external CAF support.

ISC is working to build emergency management capacity and expertise in First Nations communities and organizations through EMAP's \$12.9M in annual capacity funding to support over 260 individual full or part-time Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) positions in First Nations communities, Tribal Councils and other First Nations organizations across the country.

Following an emergency event, ISC may also support temporary EMC positions to aid communities in accomplishing the array of administrative tasks that are associated with recovering from an emergency event.

To further increase their capacity, EMAP funds non-structural mitigation and preparedness initiatives through the Non-Structural Mitigation and Preparedness funding stream. This funding stream is proposal-based and funds non-structural mitigation projects undertaken by First Nations communities on reserve to prepare for and mitigate emergencies caused by natural disasters, such as flooding, landslides, tsunamis, severe weather and drought.

EMAP also supports wildland fire non-structural mitigation and preparedness initiatives through the FireSmart funding stream. FireSmart builds skills in First Nations communities to prevent and prepare against wildland fires. Programming involves training First Nations teams in wildfire suppression duties, as well as fuel management and vegetation clearing, which reduces the intensity and spread of wildfires. FireSmart also leverages Indigenous knowledge of the local environment and terrain to improve emergency planning, preparation, and response to wildfires.

Bilateral and Multilateral Service Agreements:

To enhance the delivery of emergency management services to First Nations communities on reserves, including emergency preparedness and response and recovery efforts, ISC has bilateral agreements with provincial and territorial governments and third-party service delivery partners across the country. These agreements were put in place to ensure First Nations had access to emergency response services comparable to other residents in their jurisdiction.

ISC is now working to develop First Nations led multilateral agreements, involving First Nations, provincial/territorial, and federal governments, as well as relevant service providers.

Through the development of emergency management multilateral service agreements, First Nations Peoples will be full and equal partners with Canada and provincial and territorial governments in emergency management and support the inclusion of all partners in decision making and implementation mechanisms. Further, multilateral agreements support the formalization of First Nations-led emergency management through clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each party during emergency events, thereby strengthening preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts in communities. New multilateral agreements will also ensure culturally appropriate emergency management services are provided directly to First Nation communities.

Multilateral discussions have begun in all Provinces and Territories across the country where there are EMAP eligible First Nation communities and formal negotiations have begun in multiple regions.

As negotiations are under way, existing bilateral agreements are ensuring services are delivered to First Nations on-reserve communities. Currently ISC has bilateral emergency management service agreements in place with:

- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Manitoba
- Ontario

- Quebec
- Prince Edward Island
- Yukon
- Northwest Territories

In provinces and territories where there is no agreement in place, ISC works with the provincial or territorial government, First Nations, tribal councils and third-party organizations to deliver emergency services and supports to First Nation communities on reserves through the Emergency Management Assistance Program.

Department of National Defence

The Canadian Safety and Security Program (CSSP) is a federally-funded program that supports federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments in the development of innovative science and technology advancements that contribute to the safety and security of Canadians. Projects funded by CSSP strengthen Canada's ability to anticipate, prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters, serious accidents, crime, and terrorism through the convergence of science and technology (S&T) with policy, operations, and intelligence.

CSSP allows government organizations to meet their safety and security requirements with science and technology solutions in collaboration with industry and/or academia.

The CSSP is managed by the Department of National Defence (DND) in partnership with Public Safety Canada (PSC). Coordination of the CSSP is led by the Centre for Security Science within DND's science and technology organization, Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC).

Recommendation 7: That the Government of Canada take an inventory of all assets, across all departments, that can be used in disaster assistance and undertake, in partnership with provinces and territories, a national review of emergency management planning and response capacity.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is working towards the implementation of a modernized FERP, standardization through the CCCL, and ongoing capability assessments via the National Risk Profile. The Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) National Emergency Strategic Stockpile (NESS) also plays a crucial role in maintaining necessary medical supplies. The NESS is a critical component of Canada's disaster response assets, ensuring that necessary medical resources are available and can be quickly deployed in the event of an emergency. This stockpile is regularly inventoried and updated to meet the evolving needs of emergency response. Future plans focus on comprehensive asset inventory, national review, and enhanced integration with the NESS to promote a coordinated and efficient disaster response across Canada. These efforts align with the overarching goals outlined in the *Emergency Management Framework for Canada* and the *Emergency Management Strategy for Canada: Toward a Resilient 2030*.

Federal Emergency Response Plan (FERP): As detailed in recommendation 4, the FERP outlines the responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for federal departments during emergencies. It includes processes for taking inventory of federal assets that can be mobilized during disasters, ensuring that all available resources are utilized effectively. The FERP facilitates coordination between federal, territorial and provincial partners to support comprehensive disaster response efforts.

As detailed in recommendation 4, the CCCL defines essential EM capabilities that jurisdictions across Canada must possess. By standardizing these capabilities, the CCCL aids in the inventory of assets by ensuring that all departments and agencies are aware of the skills and resources required for effective disaster response. This standardization supports a more efficient allocation and utilization of assets during emergencies.

National Risk Profile (NRP) Capability Assessments: The NRP is a comprehensive assessment of the risks and capabilities across Canada. It identifies gaps in EM and informs strategic planning. This helps ensure that all available assets are inventoried and can be mobilized when necessary.

Recommendation 8: That the Government of Canada assess whether there is a need to procure or lease additional equipment, including water bombers.

The Government of Canada agrees in principle with this recommendation.

Recognizing the primary role of the provinces and territories with regards to the procurement of wildland firefighting equipment, the Government of Canada works with provincial and territorial partners to continuously assess the need for firefighting equipment, including aviation resources such as waterbombers.

The Government of Canada is a partner in a national coordination mechanism to support provinces and territories in wildfire fire response, and recently launched an equipment fund to support the efforts of provinces and territories in procuring specialized wildland firefighting equipment to strengthen capacities and capabilities in fire management across Canada.

The federal government's mechanism for supporting response is through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC), which is owned and operated by the federal, provincial, and territorial agencies responsible for wildland fire management in Canada. Included in CIFFC's role is the coordination of aerial firefighting resources. NRCan works with CIFFC and provincial and territorial partners to assess the status of, and future needs for, firefighting equipment (including aviation resources) to support coordination and investment planning among jurisdictions. Federal departments which have responsibilities for wildfire suppression on lands under their jurisdiction (i.e., Parks Canada, ISC, and DND) do not own airtankers for wildfire suppression. Agreements are in place with PTs to provide aerial firefighting support during wildfire events, or access to this type of service is through existing CIFFC agreements.

During recent wildfire seasons, Canada's wildland fire response capacity has been frequently stretched to the limit. In 2022, NRCan launched the *Fighting and Managing Wildfire in a Changing Climate* (FMWCC) initiative in response to needs identified by provinces and territories. In just under two years, the *FMWCC-Equipment Fund* has committed more than \$222 million to support provinces and territories in acquiring new wildland firefighting equipment (vehicles, mobile units, hoses, pumps, enhanced communications equipment, avionics upgrades, and repair for aging equipment), many of which were used to combat wildland fires in 2023. Additional planned purchases in the aviation sector includes, but are not limited to, new and used/refurbished aircraft purchases, upgrades, contracted aircraft services, drones, and runway upgrades.

The Government of Canada will continue to work with provinces and territories in bolstering their wildfire response and suppression capacities and capabilities.

Recommendation 9: That the Government of Canada create a domestic service medal to recognize all military deployments in our communities (Operation LENTUS, Operation LASER, major international events, etc.) and that this medal take into account the cumulative time of deployments to encourage military personnel to participate to short-term deployments.

The Government of Canada takes note of the recommendation.

DND/CAF has long acknowledged the sacrifices made by CAF members and the challenges experienced while deployed on domestic operations. Administered by the Governor General, the Canadian honours system provides individual recognition to those who go above and beyond the call of duty. Numerous decorations for bravery, meritorious service decorations and departmental awards have been granted to individuals who served on domestic operations. In addition, all military duty that is not performed as part of an overseas mission or under exceptional circumstances is recognized by the Canadian Forces' Decoration (CD), which is awarded after 12 years of loyal and good service to recognize the special character of military service and the risks inherent to the military profession.

Lastly, managed under the Minister of Public Safety's responsibilities for national leadership in emergency management, the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award recognizes those who have distinguished themselves by exemplary conduct, actions and leadership as emergency management professionals.

DND/CAF will continue to explore different avenues through which service could be recognized, whether through the issuance of service medals or other means of recognition.

Recommendation 10: That the Government of Canada increase youth participation in combatting climate change and climate disasters by enticing thousands of young adults into the humanitarian workforce.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The Government of Canada undertook a public consultation related to pan-Canadian civilian response capacity. As part of this engagement, PS is exploring how youth participation in the EM and humanitarian workforces can be strategically leveraged in emergency response, and the means through which youth groups could be organized and coordinated to support disaster events. The results from the engagement will inform future government decisions.

The EMS was endorsed in January 2019 by federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for EM and establishes five priority areas to strengthen the resilience of Canadian society by 2030, one of which is to enhance whole-of-society collaboration and governance to strengthen resilience.

PS and federal partners responsible for EM activities have been working diligently to build on existing relationships while also creating new opportunities for open dialogue and collaboration, while respecting jurisdictional roles.

Drawing on best practices of international partners, PS is actively exploring means and approaches to fostering inclusivity and collaboration with a wide range of underrepresented groups in order to enhance the effectiveness of emergency response efforts. As announced by the Minister of Emergency Preparedness in February 2024, PS is currently engaging with a broad range of emergency management partners and stakeholders to understand pan-Canadian civilian response capacity in Canada. Key partners and stakeholders have included provinces and territories, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous leaders, voluntary and youth organizations, private sector, academia, and other key emergency management stakeholders. Through this engagement, PS is looking to understand current capacities, gaps and limitations on key topics relating to emergency response and gather insights and views on ways to more efficiently leverage these capacities following large-scale emergency events in Canada. Engaging with partners and stakeholders across the country is critical to ensure views and expertise are reflective of the unique needs of each jurisdiction.

Recommendation 11: That the Government of Canada establish a national adaptation strategy to build resilience against climate disasters.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The Government of Canada is committed to building resilience against climate disasters.

In June 2023, the Government of Canada released Canada's first National Adaptation Strategy, which outlines a vision for a more climate-resilient country. The Strategy was developed in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous partners, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, adaptation experts, and youth. The Strategy aims to direct actions across five interconnected systems:

1. Disaster Resilience
2. Health and Well-being
3. Nature and Biodiversity

4. Infrastructure

5. Economy and Workers

It is underpinned by a set of guiding principles, acknowledging that *how* Canada reaches its goals and objectives is just as important. For each system, the Strategy sets long-term transformational goals, medium-term objectives, and near-term targets to focus the efforts of governments and communities across the five systems and to help ensure future climate change adaptation investments are effective.

Released alongside the Strategy, the Government of Canada Adaptation Action Plan details a comprehensive suite of initiatives to advance the goals and objectives laid out in the National Adaptation Strategy. These actions address the climate risks that matter most to Canadians, such as wildfires, floods, and extreme heat. Some actions include:

- The Wildfire Resilient Futures Initiative which will invest \$284 million over five years in community wildfire prevention and mitigation activities; developing evidence-based approaches to enhance and support community resilience; and to establish a Centre of Excellence for Wildland Fire Innovation and Resilience.
- Building climate-resilient infrastructure to help communities address climate change disasters by investing nearly \$3.8 billion in the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund since 2018.

Additionally, the Action Plan spotlights the *Emergency Management Strategy*, which is Canada's official disaster risk reduction strategy and guides federal and provincial governments to take action to improve emergency management capacity and reduce disaster risk. Aligning our efforts between the National Adaptation Strategy and Emergency Management Strategy will help ensure that the collective response to disasters is responsive and considers the growing impacts and costs of climate change.

Taken together, the National Adaptation Strategy and Government of Canada Adaptation Action Plan represent a comprehensive approach to prepare for climate change, build safer and climate resilient communities, create jobs, and support a stronger economy.

Recommendation 12: That the Government of Canada enact all recommendations in the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces' report, entitled *Hidden Battles: A systemic investigation into the identification of mental health needs and support for Primary Reserve members participating in domestic operations*.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The CAF will endeavour to implement the report's recommendations within the timeframe requested, noting that expanding mental health programming will depend on the availability of mental health specialists, who are in short supply and in high demand.

DND/CAF recognizes the importance of mental health support and access to mental health care for all military personnel and have made significant improvements in building a robust mental health program over the past decades. The CAF is committed to identifying and supporting Primary Reserve members who participate in domestic operations and who are at risk of mental health issues through evidence-based screening, education, counseling, and treatment as appropriate.

With respect to recommendations 1 (formalize post-deployments check-ins by fall 2025) and 2 (strengthen oversight of mental health screenings) of the Ombudsman's report, while there is a mandatory requirement for Post Deployment Screening, the CAF recognizes that it needs to be consistently applied. The CAF is reviewing the current requirements in its Standing Operations Order for Domestic Operations, and will make amendments, as appropriate.

With respect to recommendations 3 (expand virtual care services to offer mental health services), 4 (ensure compliance with training on mental health supports and Reserve Force

entitlements for all those involved in the administration and provision of health care),⁵ (improve the knowledge and awareness of mental health supports available to all Primary Reserve members before, during and after a domestic operation including recourse mechanisms) and 6 (complete the ongoing review of the mental health services needs of equity-deserving groups), the CAF recognizes the sacrifices that Primary Reserve personnel make in the service of their country and leadership is committed to ensuring they receive appropriate health care and support. The CAF also recognizes there are still obstacles associated with access to mental health care and a requirement for improved communications between the CAF and Primary Reserve members. The CAF is committed to meeting CAF members' mental health needs, which contribute to retention, readiness and, ultimately, to a continued ability to support Canadians during domestic emergencies.

Recommendation 13: That the Standing Committee on National Defence conduct a further study on the modernization of career progression and service medals system in the Canadian Armed forces.

Should the Standing Committee on National Defence decide to undertake a study on this issue, the Government of Canada would be pleased to support the committee in its efforts, where possible.

Recommendation 14: That the Government of Canada consider investing in a professional and permanent disaster management workforce, such as a Canadian resilience corps, who could be quickly mobilized and deployed to disaster zones for response and recovery efforts.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

In Canada, EM is a shared responsibility. Provinces and territories exercise responsibility for EM within their respective jurisdictions, and the federal government responds to requests for assistance from provinces and territories to help coordinate support when and where it's needed.

Since 2021, the Government of Canada has provided funding through the HWF program to enable humanitarian non-governmental organizations in Canada to build capacity to respond to all-hazard events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters, such as floods and wildfires.

The HWF program has supported the deployment of the Red Cross, the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada, St. John Ambulance, the Salvation Army and Team Rubicon Canada in response to Requests for Federal Assistance from provinces and territories.

The Government of Canada has undertaken targeted engagement with a broad range of emergency management partners and stakeholders to understand pan-Canadian civilian response capacity in Canada. As part of this engagement, the following themes were explored: Understanding current capacities, gaps, and challenges; Stakeholder roles and responsibilities; Coordination and governance; Mobilizing underrepresented groups, and Traditional Indigenous knowledge. Findings from this engagement include insights and views on ways to leverage whole-of-society capacity following large-scale emergency events in Canada and reduce reliance on the Canadian Armed Forces.

Recommendation 15: That the Government of Canada strengthen the emergency response capabilities and capacity of the Canadian Rangers and give them a disaster workforce role in the north to benefit their communities and adjacent communities.

The Government of Canada agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The CAF is committed to increasing the overall operational readiness of the Canadian Rangers, including for domestic operations as part of the CAF's role as a force of last resort, by ensuring that they are properly trained, equipped, structured, staffed and supported by policies, directives, regulations, and orders that enable them to fulfill their role, mission and task.

As part of Canada's 2017 defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, and its 2024 updated defence

policy *Our North, Strong, and Free*, the CAF has undertaken a comprehensive review of the roles and responsibilities of the Canadian Rangers that will lead to expanding their training and effectiveness while improving their functional capability within the CAF. Through this initiative, the CAF is also exploring their role as a domestic force and how they can enhance community resiliency across Canada.

However, while the Canadian Rangers can provide assistance during a response to a domestic emergency, they should not be considered a “first option” as a disaster workforce capability. As part-time reservists, they have a limited availability for training, have other primary employment and are often already key members of the first responder’s civilian capacity.

With the understanding that future CAF deployments to provide aid to civil power is both critically important in some circumstances and unavoidable, the Canadian Rangers will be an integral component of the CAF capability to respond quickly and efficiently in the affected communities where Canadian Rangers are present.

Recommendation 16: That the Government of Canada leverage organizations by bringing them together under an NGO consortium that works as an auxiliary to the government to better coordinate and to identify what capabilities these organizations bring to the table and what their ability to respond is.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

The GOC continues to work with provincial and territorial partners both ahead of and during emergency events pending potential requests for assistance. A full review of the RFA process was recently completed, and HWF programming and the role of NGOs are being maximized by the GOC to respond to events and grow overall capacity. Unlike other international and national partners, the GOC does not currently have clear authority to direct or resource emergency events, including actively supporting the ability to deploy volunteer organizations.

Since 2021, the Government of Canada has provided funding through the HWF program, to respond to large-scale domestic emergencies.

The HWF program, which is funded until March 2026, provides financial support to key organizations to support in building a scalable civilian workforce that can be rapidly deployed in emergencies, broadening the resources available to respond to human-induced and climate-related disasters in Canada, and reducing the reliance on the CAF in disaster response. The program funds NGOs that possess specialized skills and expertise to respond to a variety of events that could initiate RFAs from provincial and territorial governments. Additionally, due to increased capacity, NGOs have been able to enter direct bilateral arrangements with PTs to provide surge capacity in response to COVID-19, flooding, wildfires, and other large-scale emergencies.

The Government of Canada also recognizes that a sustainable approach for a pan-Canadian civilian response capacity is needed to keep pace with the evolving threat environment and has been undertaking comprehensive engagement to help inform decisions on an integrated and sustainable approach.