



OSI SPECIAL SECTION

OVERVIEW



“

A VETERAN IS ANY PERSON WHO IS SERVING OR HAS HONORABLY SERVED IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES, THE COMMONWEALTH OR ITS WARTIME ALLIES, OR AS A REGULAR MEMBER OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE, OR AS A PEACE OFFICER IN A SPECIAL DUTY AREA OR ON A SPECIAL DUTY OPERATION, OR WHO HAS SERVED IN THE MERCHANT NAVY OR FERRY COMMAND DURING WARTIME.

”



THE CHALLENGE – OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURIES IN THE VETERAN COMMUNITY

Operational Stress Injury (OSI) is defined by The Royal as “any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed while serving in the Canadian Forces or as a member of the RCMP. Difficulties may occur during combat duties, after serving in a war zone, in peacekeeping missions, or following other traumatic or serious events not specific to combat. Common OSIs include, but are not limited to, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), other anxiety disorders, depression, substance use disorders and other conditions that may interfere with daily functioning.”¹

Veterans Affairs Canada reports “about one-fifth of Canadian Veterans experience a diagnosed mental health disorder at some time during their lives– the most common are depression, PTSD and anxiety disorders. In a 2010 study of Veterans who released from service between 1998 and 2007, about 24% reported they had a diagnosed mental health condition such as PTSD, depression or anxiety.”²

Chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Operational Stress Injuries are some of the least understood afflictions affecting military and RCMP members, Veterans, and first responders. As they are often left undiagnosed and/or misunderstood; or because symptoms often appear after release from the Armed Forces, Veterans are often left to their own devices to get the required medical care. In many cases, they are unable to access the necessary diagnosticians and care providers because of the disconnects between Veterans Affairs Canada, provincial Ministries of Health, and the local health systems. To compound the challenge, the nature of OSIs often inhibits individuals from seeking help or accessing available resources.

The mental health challenges facing Veterans, including serving military and RCMP members, and the impact it has on their families, are widespread and growing. There is an identified and urgent need in the Veteran community to find new ways to identify and help those suffering from OSIs.

ESTABLISHING A NEW FOCUS AND COMMITMENT TO THE OSI CHALLENGE – THE LEGION’S OSI SPECIAL SECTION

In response to the growing need to support and advocate for Veterans suffering from OSIs, a motion was passed at the 46th Dominion Convention to establish the Operational Stress Injury Special Section. The OSI Special Section offers a new way to strengthen our ability to support and advocate for Veteran mental health and also to engage our membership.

THE MANDATE OF THE OSI SPECIAL SECTION

The mandate of the OSI Special Section is to recognize and address the needs of Veterans suffering with an operational stress injury, through outreach, information, referral services and advocacy support. The OSI Special Section is a peer support network that will provide enhanced outreach and support, free of charge, for all Veterans as defined by the Legion:

“A Veteran is any person who is serving or has honorably served in the Canadian Armed Forces, the Commonwealth or its wartime allies, or as a Regular Member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or as a Peace Officer in a Special Duty Area or on a Special Duty Operation, or who has served in the Merchant Navy or Ferry Command during wartime.”



MEMBER OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH THE OSI SPECIAL SECTION

The OSI Special Section is a national, member-driven, peer-support network, providing eligible Legion members with the opportunity to support and advocate for Veteran mental health. The OSI Special Section is open to Legion members in good standing, who are Veterans as defined by the Legion and who are affected by OSI.

For a small annual fee, eligible members can register with the OSI Section to show their support and volunteer in their community. Members will support the OSI Section mandate by:

- coordinating and conducting outreach activities in the community
- helping to identify and refer any Veteran or their family member who needs help with an OSI issue to the Legion's Service Bureau for support
- promoting mental health information and helping dispel the stigma of mental illness, and
- supporting advocacy efforts and information sharing at the Branch, Provincial Command and National levels

OPERATION OF THE OSI SPECIAL SECTION

The OSI Special Section will manage its operations and finances, and administer member participation in the Section, including eligibility, registration, member fees, communications, and activities. Fees to join the OSI Special Section are in addition to Legion membership dues.

THE LEGION RESPONDS – A HISTORY OF SERVICE, SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

The Royal Canadian Legion is committed to ensuring Veterans and their families have access to the care and support they need. Though we cannot assist directly in the specialized area of mental health, the Service Officer Network assists Veterans in getting help, from assistance with access to Veterans Affairs Canada disability benefits and services, to referrals to specialized programs and supports.

In addition to providing support services, the Legion advocates for improvements in government programs available to assist with mental health. We routinely speak before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to highlight our concerns based on our experience helping Veterans and their families. The Legion also works on local, provincial and national levels to support mental health programs and funds research to enhance the life-long care of all Veterans and their families.

The establishment of the OSI Special Section will further strengthen the Legion's ability to respond to the needs of the Veteran community. Through this Section, the Legion will build on our outreach and support activities and enhance our advocacy efforts. In addition, this member-driven initiative will engage the efforts of our Veteran members, especially those with OSIs, and provide them with an opportunity to get involved and become part of the solution.

Establishing the OSI Special Section will help increase our relevance, both with today's Veterans, and with our membership.



¹ [HTTP://WWW.THEROYAL.CA/MENTAL-HEALTH-CENTRE/MENTAL-HEALTH-PROGRAMS/AREAS-OF-CARE/OPERATIONAL-STRESS-INJURIES-AND-PTSD](http://www.theroyal.ca/mental-health-centre/mental-health-programs/areas-of-care/operational-stress-injuries-and-ptsd)

² [HTTP://WWW.VETERANS.GC.CA/ENG/SERVICES/HEALTH/MENTAL-HEALTH/UNDERSTANDING-MENTAL-HEALTH](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/services/health/mental-health/understanding-mental-health)



Dominion Command

86 Aird Place, Ottawa, ON Canada K2L 0A1
613-591-3335 | 1-888-556-6222

legion.ca

