

**Dominion Command
Veterans, Service and Seniors Committee
VIA ZOOM
9 March 2023, 1330 – 1600
Record of Discussion**

File: 65-1

IN ATTENDANCE:

Bruce Julian	-	Chairman
Owen Parkhouse	-	Vice-Chairman
Larry Murray	-	Ex-Officio
Bill Chafe	-	Member
John Mahon	-	Member
Dave Gordon	-	Homeless Veterans
George O'Dair	-	Seniors Advisor
Trevor Jenvenne	-	BSO Legion OSI
	-	Special Section
Carolyn Hughes	-	Coordinator
Alexa Pasha	-	Assistant Coordinator

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Comrade Bruce welcomed everyone to our first meeting of 2023.

Comrade Carolyn Hughes has been named as one of 2023's Top 20 Women in Defence by Esprit de Corps magazine for her work helping Veterans. Congratulations Carolyn!

Comrade Bruce noted that towards the end of 2022, we began to see less restrictions from the pandemic and a few more face to face meetings including the Bilateral Meeting with the Deputy Minister of VAC on the 11th of January. It was supposed to happen in late fall, early winter but the Minister and his staff were not available.

Comrades Bruce, Steven Clark and Carolyn spoke about the backlog and were briefed that it has been reduced, that they are working on the longest/oldest claims, they adjudicate some claims by condition such as mental health or hearing loss and are looking at ways to automate. The gap between men and women claims has closed, however French claim wait times are still slightly longer. We also received briefings on the ongoing National Veterans Employment Strategy, the Voc/Rehab Contract, the Veterans Independence Program, Long-Term Care, and we spoke about The Burn's Way, Op Harmony and the definition of a Veteran for RCMP members and Veterans.

2. REVIEW OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion to approve the minutes from 20 December 2022 was brought forward.

Comrade John brought forward an observation, change request: Poppy Manual on Food Banks was amended in April 2021 not December 2021. *Please note this change will be completed in May, when there is ability to update the website.*

Comrade John noted that Poppy Committee Coordinator has confirmed that food banks are a permissible expenditure from Poppy Trust Funds.

Comrade Bill inquired on VAC reestablishing the visits at the Branch level. Comrade Carolyn will speak with the Deputy Minister on this matter and report back. Comrade Bruce noted that importance of getting back on to this, and that this message will be shared with the deputy minister.

Coordinator Note: Comrade Carolyn has been assured by the VAC Outreach Team that they are again visiting Branches in person and in some cases, where their offices are being renovated, have been welcomed by Branches to provide space when they meet with Veterans.

Comrade Bill brought forward an action item from previous meeting. The certificates for TPS Constables are being finalized by Comrade Carolyn and she will share with the committee when this has been finalized.

ACTION: Comrade Carolyn

MOTION: It was moved and seconded that the members approved the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 20 December 2022, and the amendments.

CARRIED

3. UPDATES

a. Disability Wait Times

VAC has been making progress on the backlog of disability claims and expect it to be cleared up by the summer of 2023. We continue to monitor for any delays, as it is unacceptable that their health may continue to deteriorate while waiting for decisions. We recommended to the Deputy Minister and staff in the last meeting, that there needs to be something done at supporting the applications longer than 2 years wait.

b. VOC Rehab Third Party Contract

We are still monitoring this as the contract is implemented. At this time, there has not been complaints heard at the Legion house level from individual Veterans, albeit there have been a few implementation problems that we are closely monitoring.

c. Homeless Veterans/ TPS

Please see attached report from Comrade Dave.

BC/Yukon Command has taken steps to enhance their Homeless program and Alberta/NWT Command has sent out letters to various Municipalities to introduce the Homeless Veterans program. Great steps forward and it is hoped they will get positive responses. Ontario Command continues to enhance their program.

Dominion Command, Veterans Services, will verify a Veterans service with written consent from the Veteran.

Comrades Dave, Carolyn and Alexa attended a meeting with McGill University, Max Bell School of Public Policy, research student in March 2023. They are conducting a study to determine *“What federal policies and programs are needed to ensure meaningful reductions in veteran homelessness and advance the right to adequate housing for all veterans in Canada?”* They are interviewing many other organizations and a report is expected late summer/early fall timeframe.

Comrades Larry and Carolyn went to the opening of the Legions Veterans Village Legion in Surrey, British Columbia. There are 91 affordable housing units and the model has been extremely successful in what it offers regarding integrated health and housing affordability.

d. Seniors - Please see attached report from Comrade George.

There has been many occurrences of Ministers or other stakeholders in LTC making announcements of what is going to happen to LTC beds, housing and health care. With this, there needs to be initiatives in hiring thousands of new nurses and personal support workers. We hear of new rules to respect medical qualifications to attract qualified foreign doctors, etc. but little action has been taken.

Some affordable housing is starting to come forward, and there are hundreds of thousands more promised.

On February 7, 2023, the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$198.6 billion over 10 years, including \$46.2 billion in new funding, to improve health care services for Canadians. The funding is an immediate, unconditional \$2 billion Canada Health Transfer (CHT) top-up to address immediate pressures on the health care system. Negotiations with the Provinces are ongoing.

Regarding what could help our elderly Veteran population, it was noted that a stronger version of VIP would support aging Veterans to remain at home. This would greatly impact the pressure on LTC facilities, and it is felt that a letter needs to go out on these issues. The Committee will do so in the future when it will have the greatest impact.

e. BSO Legion OSI Special Section - *Please see attached report from Comrade Trevor.*

Congratulations to Comrade Trevor, he and his executive have been elected to another term of office for the next three years!

Buddy Check Coffee and OpVetbuild are both, moving on successfully. Recent news article on the BCC was released in the Legion. Ca (website mag). Going forward all hosts will be required to submit to Criminal Record and Vulnerable Sector Screening, as well as be willing to take a Legion 101 PowerPoint Course currently under development and take Mental Health Programming as directed.

There is concern, that the RCMP continues to lag behind the CAF in terms of Mental Health Programming and is felt to be something that the committee should be monitoring very closely.

Further, it has been noted that a large number of RCMP members do not know what the Legion, and Veterans Services can do for them. Comrade Trevor spoke to a variety of members, and most were filling out their own VAC Claims. They did not know that the Legion offered this service free of charge. Comrade Trevor noted a beneficial time to speak to RCMP members would be speaking to them at their Block Training.

Comrade Bill had suggested that there may be greater potential for creating partnership with the RCMP by having the RCMP Veterans Association on board with supports, creating internal discussion, and then the potential to reach out to all their members.

f. The Burns Way

Comrade Carolyn confirmed a letter of support for the Initiative has been sent to the Minister of VAC, the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Cyd Courshesne, Grand Chief David Gamble (Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans Association) and Chief Bobbie Cameron and Vice-Chief Edward Lerat of the Federation of Sovereign Indian Nations in Saskatchewan.

Further discussion continues regarding the statement of work, and another meeting has been set to address this initiative before DEC. A briefing from the Initiative will occur at DEC as well as any updates.

4. NEW ITEMS

a. Command Service Officer Stats for 2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022	+ / -
First Applications	3478	2819	2394	2678	12%
Departmental Reviews	601	310	247	151	-39%
Entitlement Reviews	161	219	204	141	-31%
Entitlement Appeals/RfRs	143	99	83	97	17%

The number of First Applications has increases and is expected to continue as the restrictions from the Pandemic are lifted and Veterans can see their family doctors in person again. As with every Canadian, a doctor shortage is making it difficult for Veterans who do not have family doctors to assist in the completion of Medical Questionnaires for VAC.

Comrade Carolyn feels Departmental Reviews and Entitlement Reviews have decreased due to the trickling backlog from VAC to the Bureau of Pension Advocates and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

This has created delays in hearing scheduling, which is still recovering from the inability to have face to face hearings during COVID. She is hoping the recent Budget announcement will also address shortages in these areas in addition to those with VAC.

b. Ombuds Report- Disability Pension Reductions, Merlo Davidson Settlement Compensation

The Ombuds' report stems from a Class Action Lawsuit to resolve claims of case members who experienced gender and/or sexual orientation-based harassment and discrimination. The monetary amounts fell into multiple levels to recognize that there are many different forms of gender or sexual

orientation-based harassment and discrimination and unique impacts on the individuals.

It was determined that because the first two levels for compensation do not compensate for any disability, claimants should not have their pension reduced. In levels 3-6 it was found that the government had not been sufficiently transparent about how it determines the compensation amounts or methodology used to reduce the portion of the disability pension under the Pension Act.

There is a call for the government to issue corrective payment to the women whose pension amounts were clawed back and to immediately cease disability pension reductions by VAC.

c. ACVA Report- Survivor Retirement Pension Benefits (Marriage After 60)

In the last two mandate letters to the Ministers of VAC, National Defence and Public Safety, they were ordered to eliminate the clause that a survivor is not entitled to a portion of their late spouse's pension benefits should, they marry after the age of 60.

The ACVA report of December 2022 makes 9 recommendations including one to determine the appropriate responsible department, to explain the reasons for creating and maintaining the clauses, that access to financial advice about pensions is available before they retire, that the government distribute the \$150 million Veterans Survivors Fund, to repeal the "marriage after 60" clause and modernize pension benefits to prevent poverty.

This has been and will remain an advocacy item for the Legion and will continue to be monitored.

d. Unspent VAC Budget \$920 Million

It was recently announced that almost \$1 billion was not expended by VAC in 2022. Although they deny that it is correlated to the backlog in disability claims, citing the improvements in the numbers over the standard wait time, other organizations such as NCVA disagree. They state that due to the backlog there is money not spent and that until it is cleared up, there will always be a "residual carry-over".

e. Veteran Support Partnership Program Application- Can Praxis-Equine Therapy

The VSS Committee discussed the application for Poppy Funds, had concerns with how few Veterans would benefit for the relatively large request for funds, and has decided not to support this request.

MOTION: That the Committee, not support the request for funds to the P&R committee.

CARRIED

Coordinator Note: The application was forwarded to P&R for consideration of the application and the VSS non-support and a regret letter was sent to the organization.

f. Heroes Mending on the Fly Canada

Further information to be discussed, as this initiative will be reviewed in the meeting on 23 March 2023. It was requested that the organization send in the official application along with testimonials.

Coordinator Note: The application, financials and testimonials were received and discussed on 23 March by the Committee and felt to be a good initiative to help Veterans.

MOTION: That the Committee support the request for funds for this program to the P&R committee.

CARRIED

The application was forwarded to P&R for consideration.

g. Royal Commission/Commission of Inquiry on Veterans' Issues

Comrade Andrea Siew, Chair of the Defence and Security Committee and former Director of the Service Bureau spoke with Comrades Carolyn, Alexa and Steven last Friday regarding her research about this subject.

Over the past several decades VAC benefits have come under the purview of the *Pension Act* to the *New Veterans Charter* and now fall under the *Well-Being Act*. This has resulted in multiple different and overlapping benefits and programs depending upon when a Veteran applies for a disability benefit. Furthermore, recommendations for fairness for all Veterans from the Minister's Advisory Groups have largely been ignored.

Comrade Andrea developed a slide presentation and briefing note for the Committee to review. Given the multiple issues and changing demographic landscape in Canada, now may be the time for this.

A meeting with Comrade Andrea will be set to further discuss this initiative, and to go over the slides created. Meeting will be set early April, more to follow then.

ACTION: Comrade Carolyn

h. AAIMS Project- Fall Prevention for Seniors

Comrade Bill provided overview of the initiative. AAIMS; stands for Adapt , Attract, Implement and Sustain Fall Prevention, and the target audience is for those 50 and over. They are looking to attract the underrepresented groups.

All data is evidence informed and is factual regarding fall prevention and how to implement this across the country.

The first meeting spoke about the consequences of falls for Seniors. These include the physical and mental health and the financial and mental costs of the Senior. There is also an impact on the federal and provincial health care system.

The project is focussed on exercise as part of the solution, with an emphasis on balance. Participants will exercise three hours per week for a year. Most programs are being run in English at this time and yet, there is no program in NL and LAB or in PEI.

During the meeting, it was noted Comrade Bill would provide input into the male consort group, where there are few volunteers.

4. ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS/ROUNDTABLE

Class Action - Miscalculation of the Disability Pensions –

Comrade Carolyn will look into the inquiry from the Committee on if a deadline exists and which legal firm can be contacted regarding the Class Action regarding miscalculation of the pension disability.

Coordinator Note: Comrade Carolyn reached out to and spoke with one of the lawyers, Malcolm Ruby, representing for the Certified Class Action regarding the incorrect calculations for cost of living on Veteran's monthly pension. Mr. Ruby confirmed there is no need to register and no deadline.

The only reason they have asked Veterans to register, was for information purposes, in case they need to gather more information from those affected, and to provide updates regarding the case, but it is not mandatory.

He also mentioned that if there is any residual money left, he would be reaching out to donate to the Poppy Fund as they did once before. He mentioned this happened when the additional monthly amounts were calculated for those under the disability award process who received a lump sum under the New Veterans Charter when they did a comparison of settlements with insurance companies.

In that case also, VAC had all the names and financial information on their files to determine who should receive additional money and how much. It automatically began to be deposited monthly if they had the banking info. He reassured Comrade Carolyn that it would be the same for those who should have received more for their monthly pensions in the past.

Comrade Owen noted that we should increase our letter writing for various advocacy issues that have not been addressed by VAC. This will be reviewed after DEC.

Comrade Dave has been asked to connect with Susan Lee from Multifaith Housing on potential expansion. He will connect with her and report back to the committee.

ACTION: Comrade Dave

Comrade Bill has brought forward the concern how we remember and honour WW2 and Korean Veterans.

Coordinator Update: Comrade Carolyn spoke with the National Executive Director and the Coordinator for the P&R Committee who advised recognition for these Veterans is done at the Branch level as we do not have a national databank of these Veterans. At the Branch, there are special dinners and known Veterans are invited and welcomed to partake in these recognition dinners. There is also the yearly Poppy Stories and last year, WWI, WW2 and Korean Veterans who had passed, were highlighted in these stories.

5. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting for the VSS Committee was scheduled for **23 May 2023** via Zoom at 1330.

6. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

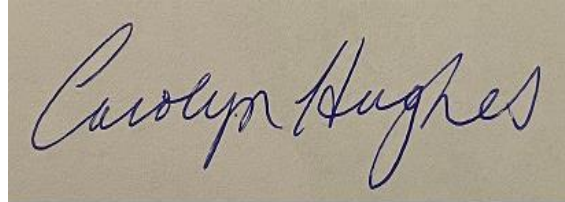
The Chair thanked all for their input, and the discussion.

MOTION: It was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 1600.

CARRIED



Bruce Julian
CHAIRMAN



Carolyn Hughes
COORDINATOR

Dated this day of 05 April 2023

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