

**Dominion Command
Veterans, Service and Seniors Committee
VIA ZOOM**

23 June 2023, 1330 – 1600

Record of Discussion

File: 65-1

IN ATTENDANCE:

Bruce Julian	-	Chairman
Bill Chafe	-	Member
John Mahon	-	Member
Dave Gordon	-	Homeless Veterans
Trevor Jenvenne	-	BSO Legion OSI Special Section
Larry Murray	-	Ex-Officio
Carolyn Hughes	-	Coordinator
Alexa Pasha	-	Assistant Coordinator

ABSENT:

Owen Parkhouse	-	Vice-Chairman
George O'Dair	-	Seniors Advisor

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Comrade Bruce welcomed everyone to the meeting. He provided a brief overview of his trip in the UK and the time spent looking at Veteran supports accessible to their UK Veteran community. He noted that the Legion in England, is a charity and run mostly by trustees.

2. REVIEW OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

There is one amendment to page 9 of the 29 March 2023 minutes. To accurately reflect Comrade Bill's note on our WW2 and Korean Veterans. The action item is on how the Legion as a whole, recognize our final remaining WW2/ Korean Veterans and is there a plan to carry out a ceremony or commemoration for these individuals.

The overall question to be carried to Dominion Command is: How are we going to recognize our last surviving WW2 and Korean Veteran and how will the branch be made aware that they need to be looking at this issue and putting something together for the recognition. Will there be guidelines or instructions coming nationally.

Carolyn will forward to Poppy and Remembrance and Ritual and Awards Committees.

A motion to approve the minutes from 29 March 2023 was brought forward.

MOTION: It was moved and seconded that the members approved the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 29 March 2023 with the amendments.

CARRIED

3. UPDATES

a. Disability Wait Times and Other VAC News.

Comrade Carolyn attended the Service Excellence and Transition Ministers Advisory Group on June 20-21.

The backlog is now at 5600 claims over the standard 16 weeks for a decision. This is down from 23,000 over the standard at the highest a few years back. Progress is being made and Comrade Carolyn will continue to monitor.

There were some comments about how the new Mental Health Benefit provides for treatment immediately upon receipt of application and that it should be for all conditions. It is unlikely that it will happen for every condition due to increased workloads and budgetary considerations. VAC looking at the possibility of incorporating other conditions – perhaps hearing aids as soon as someone applies. Comrade Carolyn will keep everyone updated on this. This is also a discussion in other advisory groups.

VAC is reviewing policies to perhaps allow Nurse Practitioners and other qualified medical professionals to diagnosis and complete medical questionnaires for disability applications, given there is a lack of Doctors across Canada.

There were discussions on automatically recording phone calls when veterans speak with Case Managers and Veterans Service Agents. Comrade Carolyn cautioned about privacy, hindering veterans from being open about their situation/conditions, overall security of the recordings etc. She advised perhaps they needed a bigger sample size for the decision as they only asked about 480 veterans for feedback.

b. The Burns Way

A proposal letter was sent to the Minister's office and several of his key staff. Comrade Carolyn distributed to the Provincial Command EDs and SOs. It is now at a stage where we wait to see if they are granted the funding to move forward. More details about the specifics of the work will follow if funding is granted. The Legion is not taking the lead on this. Updates to follow from Comrade Carolyn.

Once the money has been approved, VSS will revisit the proposal as the existing one is still only a draft.

Comrade Trevor noted there will be another meeting in the upcoming week, and further details to come.

c. VOC Rehab Third Party Contract

Over half of Veterans on Vocational Rehabilitation have been transferred to the new contract. Despite the Union stating there are problems and complaints, Veterans Services nation-wide has not heard any valid complaints. It is important to understand there has always been a third-party contract involved.

Comrade Bruce agreed that unless we hear specific issues or complaints, we will take this off any further agendas.

d. Marriage After 60 Clause

At this time, DND has no intention of eliminating this clause and responded that it is a much bigger challenge than DND/CAF because it appears in other Acts, such as the Public Service Superannuation Act and the RCMP Superannuation Act, that govern pensions.

Comrade Carolyn noted that she feels this is not a topic which will be reopened in the near future.

Comrade John noted that a letter was sent voicing the Legions stance on this topic. However, there are all kinds of issues being brought forward to the Government and this may be another one part of the long list which exists. This is also a resolution that has been brought forward from across the country for many years.

Comrade George sent in his comments and noted that Canadians are now being told that the clause appears in Acts that govern other pensions, not just those applicable to Veterans and RCMP Veterans. He stated this practice is out-dated unfair treatment and feels it must stop.

e. Homeless Veterans/ TPS Program -

Please see attached report from Comrade Dave for full overview.

The Ontario Government has indicated they are investing in a Province wide Homeless prevention program with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH). The program will deliver support to the 47 Service Managers across the province. There was a presentation in Fort McMurray in which Comrade John noted that there were many agencies involved in the meeting he attended.

Comrades Carolyn, Alexa and Dave met with David Keedwell on May 25, VAC Homeless representative for an introductory meeting. He is the Director General at VAC responsible for Intergovernmental Programs such as the new initiative for funding Veteran Homelessness. Since this meeting Mr. Keedwell's staff have reached out and requested a second meeting to further discuss gaps in services and Homeless initiatives taking way with the new grant.

Dr. Cheryl Forchuck is submitting a funding request to VAC for a Research program for Female Homeless Veterans. Comrades Carolyn, Alexa and Dave attended a Zoom meeting with Dr. Forchuck's team and a draft presentation in which we have reviewed. The project proposal was put forth to VAC and if approved for funding, we may be called upon to advertise the study and the call for volunteers to contact the research team if they wish to participate.

Comrade Carolyn spoke of the recent meeting with Ministers Blair and Brian May about the initiative and that the Military Veterans Wellness Program (MVWP) with the TPS is requesting support from the federal government.

Comrade Dave noted that at this time, he has heard that most referrals the program is getting, are not Homeless Veterans.

Comrade Dave asked Comrade Carolyn if the VAC offices were open. Comrade Carolyn noted that most offices are in fact open, and the best way to connect with a VAC office is to make an appointment. She mentioned some are not open as they are undergoing renovations. Comrade Bruce asked to highlight internally, the Sarnia VAC office area for concern, as of now they are not open.

f. Seniors

At this time, there is no set date for the return of the visitation program in Long Term Care facilities. VAC is waiting for all Provinces to change their visitation mandates, before being able to look at restarting this program. The Legion website was updated to reflect that at this time, the program is on pause.

Comrade Larry feels that this is topic is one that deserves a letter to support in getting the program going in the provinces where there is no need to be waiting. Comrade Carolyn will draft a letter for this.

ACTION: Carolyn

g. BSO Legion OSI Special Section

Comrade Trevor noted they are working with Ontario Command as well as streamlining Buddy Check coffee and Op Vet Build. Currently, they are in the phase where they are looking to correct any potential issues. More information to come at a later date.

h. Veterans Services Update

- **Security clearance PEDS**

Comrade Carolyn is reaching out to the PEDs to determine who may require a security clearance through VAC. Many work with their Service Officers in the same office as the files or have access to them and she wants them to be protected.

- **Service Women Salute- Aspire and Inspire Events**

Comrades Carolyn and Alexa will attend an event from 12-14 October 2023 entitled Aspire and Inspire. Carolyn will present and host one of the workshops with Comrade Alexa. Comrade Alexa will provide support in the quiet area, where women may go should any triggers be activated. There will be learning workshops, meet and greets, music, digital story recordings, art and history exhibitions, and a formal reception and dinner. The event will end with trips to Pepper Pod, Women Warriors Healing Garden and more to demonstrate the local support for female veterans. Further updates yet to come.

- **Preferred Admissions Beds**

The number of preferred admission beds in Ontario are 50 in Parkwood, 130 in the Perley Rideau, and 100 at Sunnybrook.

Comrade Bill updated that at Parkwood there is no waiting list for either category of bed and it appears since COVID, the energy levels of those Veterans staying in the facility is down. Comrade Dave noted he thinks the same is occurring at Sunnybrook and Perley.

- **Pepper Pod- Retreat Centre for Women Veterans**

Comrade Steven and others will tour the retreat in late July or early August. Comrade Carolyn will arrange.

Comrade John inquired as to who pays for the travel for the individual to Pepper Pod. Comrade Carolyn updated that the individual sessions are run in groups to strengthen the connections with one another, and they will run all across the Country.

Comrade John noted that when we support events that are more local in nature, there should be an evaluation and monitoring of potential recurring events. Comrade Bruce was in agreement of this and noted that it is important to work within the guidelines and also to support women Veterans.

It was noted that VSS as a committee, needs to be cognizant of initiatives coming up more frequently.

- i. **Ombuds Report- Disability Pension Reductions- Merlo Davidson Settlement Compensation**

A report from the OVO was shared with the Committee and the link is below. It is disappointing that VAC continues to claw back compensation amounts from VAC disability pensions for RCMP.

A letter from Comrade Bruce was sent to the Minister regarding our disappointment and calling for a compassionate resolution to ceasing the claw backs. Currently, there is no further communication from the Government at this time. Comrade Carolyn will keep the committee updated.

Link:<https://ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/en/publications/systemic-reviews/merlo-davidson-settlement-compensation>

j. ACVA Presentation

Comrade Carolyn presented to ACVA regarding the Experience of Women Veterans. A summary was attached for your viewing. We look forward to the reviewing the report and recommendations when published.

She noted that VAC is now starting to look at conditions with a gender bias lens, as this is an area where recent studies and information shows there is a difference in how the female body is impacted through service.

Link:<https://legion.ca/news/articles/2023/05/18/the-fight-continues-for-gender-equality-in-disability-claims>

k. MST- External Monitor Report 2 May 2023

The first status report regarding the external monitoring progress was released on 2 May 2023 from Jocelyn Therrien. She is the external monitor overseeing efforts to address sexual misconduct and harassment at the Department of National Defence. She notes the focus on outside input to truly transform the insular culture in the CAF, not simply reacting to what has happened or reporting on incidents, and that there needs to be an overall strategy, framework, and list of priorities of how the CAF/DND will move from one phase to the next.

A database is being developed which will contain various research, documents etc... and these with their internal research products will be made public. Stats regarding activities and investigations under sexual misconduct are to be reported by end June and are recommended to be presented to parliament on a yearly basis. Lots more to follow on this and Comrade Carolyn will keep everyone informed as she hears more.

4. Action Items

a. Red Rose Ranch, MB- veterans Horse Ranch

A \$4500 funding request from Red Rose Ranch in Manitoba was received for an equine therapy program. They only run one per year. The money includes rental of the horses, equipment, facilities, instruction, food, and lodging are covered but not the transportation for participants to get there.

Each session is 5 days long and is only loaded with four participants. Of the four participants they may be Veterans, Still-Serving Military and First Responders so it is uncertain whether the four served in the military, RCMP or local police departments.

MOTION: It was recommended to send to the Poppy and Remembrance Committee and advise that the VSS Committee does not support.

CARRIED

b. CIMVR- PhD Student sponsorship

Dominion Command will host a student SPEC event with CIMVHR in October for a cost of \$20K. Comrade Bruce will speak and host the event. This was approved at DEC and the \$20K has been sent.

At DEC it was discussed whether to support a PhD student of \$30,000. Wounded Warriors will not longer fund after next year. The Legion National Foundation has agreed to fund the master's student for \$20,000.

Comrade Carolyn will adjust the VSS Budget with the Finance Department at Dominion Command.

Comrade Larry noted that CIMVR events are well attended by medical communities, the military and universities. The event provides arms length objectives and input to VAC. There is tremendous visibility for the Legion.

MOTION: To approve the funding for a doctoral scholarship at CIMVHR from the VSS budget.

CARRIED

c. Multisite Veterans Healthcare Hub for Ottawa

Colonel (ret'd) Richard Pucci is seeking out a strategic partnership and funding for a Multisite Veterans Healthcare Hub for Ottawa and surrounding area. It would be a primary care satellite model at the existing Beechwood Physical Medicine location.

As they are located in Ontario only, The Committee will forward to Ontario Command for consideration however, the Committee will further discuss and review before sending to Ontario Command

ACTION: Carolyn

d. Royal Commission/ Commission of Inquiry on Veterans Issues

Comrade Carolyn is meeting with the Policy Advisory Ministers Advisory Group next week and this will be a topic. She will arrange a meeting with Andrea following this for further discussion. More information to follow on this matter.

Coordinator Note: The specific topic was not discussed but a merging of the best aspects of the *Pension Act* and *Veterans Well-being Act*, such as Attendance Allowance under the first versus the Veterans Independence Program under the later. It was also brought up that there are Veterans, who served in the same conflict with similar injuries, and received different and disparaging benefits because of when they applied.

5. ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS/ROUNDTABLE

Comrade Bruce visited Honour House in BC and was impressed with the agency. He explained that seeing Honour House and Veterans Village was an eye-opening experience. He noted we should recommend highlighting through our marketing program.

6. NEXT MEETING

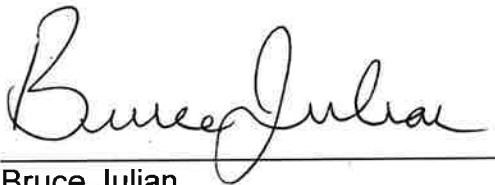
The next meeting for the VSS Committee was scheduled for **12 September 2023** via Zoom at 1100am.

7. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

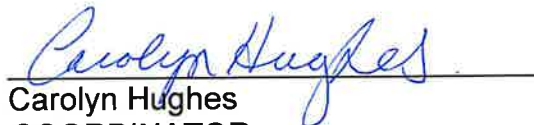
The Chair thanked all for their input, and the discussion.

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

CARRIED



Bruce Julian
CHAIRMAN



Carolyn Hughes
COORDINATOR

Dated this day of 12 July 2023