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From the opening keynote address to the closing remarks, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) played a pivotal role at the inaugural Canadian Military and Veteran Health Research Forum.

This forum, co-hosted by Queen's University and the Royal Military College of Canada (RMCC), brought together 250 researchers, health professionals, serving Canadian Forces personnel and Veterans, to focus on gaps and opportunities relating to military and Veteran health research in Canada.



Dr. David Pedlar presents his keynote address.

"This forum was the first of its kind in Canada, signalling a renaissance of military and Veteran health research in this country," said Dr. David Pedlar, VAC's Director of Research. "Our prominent presence at this event demonstrates a recognition by the host organizations and other stakeholders that VAC has an important stake in this renaissance and is well positioned to help guide it."

Stage-setting keynote addresses were delivered by the three organizations with the most vested interest in expanded and coordinated research capacity in this area: VAC, Canadian Forces Health Services and Defence Research and Development Canada.

In his keynote presentation, Dr. Pedlar painted a clear picture of the challenges in this country relating to Veteran health research, including lack of data relating to Canada's full Veteran population; monitoring and synthesizing findings from an international explosion of Veteran health research; relating those findings to a Canadian context; and finally, distinguishing between old injury and old age in determining the long-term impact of military service on health. Then, to set the stage for important partnerships and networking, Dr. Pedlar invited participants to enter a "world of opportunity" rich with research potential. This keynote

presentation generated an air of excitement and collaboration that could greatly benefit Canada's Veterans.

In his remarks, Dr. Pedlar described VAC's research capacity as "small but mighty." The Research Directorate had a very strong showing at the Forum, with presentations including:

- **Dr. Linda VanTil**, Epidemiologist: VAC's Life After Service Studies (LASS);
- **MaryBeth MacLean**, Health Economist: LASS Income Study;
- **Stewart Macintosh**, National Research Manager: Research Priorities Relating to Families of Canadian Veterans (based on research by **Wendy Lockhart** and **Peggy Ogden**);
- **Alain Poirier**, Senior Statistics Officer: Mustard Gas Nominal Rolls; and
- **Dr. David Pedlar**, Director of Research: Veteran Workplace Reintegration and Mental Disorders.

In addition, **Dr. David Ross**, National Clinic Coordinator at the National Centre for Operational Stress Injuries based at Ste. Anne's Hospital, made presentations on a suicide prevention model as well as a Web-based, client reported mental health outcomes monitoring information system.



David Ross, National Clinic Coordinator, delivers a presentation on a client-reported mental health outcomes monitoring information system used in VAC's network of operational stress injury clinics.

This very successful event, which is expected to double in size next year, was brought to a close with remarks by then senior assistant deputy minister, Policy, Programs and Partnerships **Brian Ferguson**. Mr. Ferguson spoke of the importance of translating research into meaningful programs for Canadian Forces members and Veterans and urged organizers to use future forums to attract policy and program developers as well as researchers. He ended his remarks by saying: "The conclusion of this conference does not mark an ending, but rather a beginning of sustained research into the challenges that face us."

Those words provided a perfect segue to a subsequent full-day meeting, also co-hosted by Queens and RMCC, which involved some 20 universities and other key stakeholders. VAC, led by Dr. Pedlar, was well represented at this meeting which resulted in a commitment from participants to establish a national network of researchers to focus on military and Veteran health. To get the ball rolling, Queen's and RMCC are establishing a secretariat and will be convening a steering committee, through which VAC and other stakeholders will provide advice and guidance as the initiative unfolds.

Senator Pamela Wallin, who hosted a welcome dinner for meeting participants the night before, voiced her support for this pan-Canadian initiative: "This is going to happen. We have the right people in the right places and I am behind this, 1,000%."

"As this initiative moves forward, it will be to VAC's advantage to continue to play a strong role, ultimately obtaining solid evidence upon which to base future program and policy decisions" said Dr. Pedlar. "Ultimately, Veterans and their families stand to benefit greatly from the work of the Canadian academic community and other researchers."