



# Centre for International and Defence Policy

## CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND DEFENCE POLICY

### BRIEFING NOTE

**SUBJECT:** Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Mandate Letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs

The following is a brief summary of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Mandate Letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence Kent Hehr, as well as Canada's latest iteration of its Defence Policy, titled *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Emphasis is placed on veteran reintegration services which utilize a gender lens. In particular, connections will be drawn between these documents and the research that is being conducted by the Gender Lab at the Centre for International and Defence Policy (CIDP) on its project "Gender Mainstreaming in the Military: Economic and Social Implications for Ontario." The Gender Lab team is led by Dr. Stéfanie von Hlatky, Director of the CIDP and professor at Queen's University. The team is currently focusing on research concerning the application of gendered analyses during the creation of policies and programs that effect Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Mandate Letter to Minister Kent Hehr, highlighted numerous important commitments that the current Liberal Government has made concerning veteran reintegration and support. Some of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's expectations for Minister Kent Hehr include:

1. To create a new Veteran Education Benefit Program. This program will provide veterans with funding to attend the college, university, or technical school of their choice. This is significant because education is a valuable asset when searching for employment. Having an educated veteran workforce will not only help strengthen veterans' roles within their communities, but will also enable Canadian businesses to be more cognizant of the immense value veterans can contribute to their respective organizations.
2. To improve career and vocational assistance for veterans. This assistance will provide veterans with job opportunities once they return from active service. This will be part of the Community Benefits Agreement, which will ensure that veteran's benefits for employment programs will be accessible.
3. To deliver a higher standard of care and service to veterans and uphold the "one veteran, one standard" approach. The belief is that, regardless of rank or service location, all veterans will obtain equal treatment and accessibility to resources.

Arguably, the idea of "one veteran, one standard" coincides with the research findings of the Gender Lab. Ultimately, it is incumbent that all veterans receive the same standard of care, regardless of race, sex, ethnicity or gender.

Women are the vast minority in the CAF. Currently there are approximately 10,000 women in the armed forces, which represents just under 15 percent of the total number of service members. Both men and women in the military have distinct needs that must be met; needs that can be partly addressed by adhering to a “one veteran, one standard” approach. However, more must be done to ensure that gendered considerations are applied at each level of veteran policy and program creation.

The Gender Lab promotes the idea that all veterans should receive access to educational programs and skills training upon reintegration into civilian life. Though every veteran has different aspirations, ensuring that these services are available to any veteran is a critical component of the Mandate Letter to Minister Kent Hehr. The Gender Lab is committed to providing first-class research and analysis on topics related to gender and defence studies, particularly as it relates to the gendered dimensions of military to civilian transitions. As such, the Prime Minister’s Mandate Letter to Minister Kent Hehr is indicative of the importance of the work being done by the Gender Lab, and acknowledges that there is more that can be done to integrate gendered perspectives during policy creation.

Canada’s new defence policy, introduced in 2017, brings forth innovative goals to further establish the CAF as a progressive and inclusive organization. Key aspects of the defence policy include improved veteran transition services, increased representation of women and the acknowledgment of a feminist and gendered approach to international relations. The defence policy hopes to move towards the “one veteran, one standard” approach and provide personal and contextualized methods of care and services to each Canadian veteran with a reinvented CAF Transition Group. Increasing women’s representation by 1 percent a year, until the year 2026, is one of the many goals laid out in the new defence policy. Ideally, the government hopes that women will represent 25-26 percent of Canada’s total force structure by the year 2026.

The feminist and gendered approach introduced in the defence policy is a progressive step towards gender mainstreaming and recognition of the LGBTQ community within military operations. Through the increased representation of women in the CAF and the increased incorporation of the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) program into defence policy, more all-encompassing recommendations can be made regarding Canada’s veterans.

The GBA+ program is an analytical tool created by the Government of Canada that is used to assess how groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. By further integrating these perspectives into policy creation, it enables policymakers to make more effective and inclusive decisions. These considerations, as stipulated in the defence policy, also coincide with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 related initiatives. The GBA+ program will be used in all sectors of defence activity and policy creation to ensure no discriminatory practices occur and that all veterans feel safe throughout their service and after.

The new defence policy also acknowledges the inefficiency of veteran rehabilitation and reintegration programs and strives to provide better care for Canadian veterans. These initiatives are inherently linked to the work of the Gender Lab, particularly with regards to the acknowledgment of the need for gender inclusive policy creation processes (gender mainstreaming) and gender oriented reintegration policies. Although significant progress has been made to improve veterans’ affairs in Canada, these expectations and policies must be consistently acted upon to improve the quality of life for all Canadian veterans.