

Proceedings Report

**The Gender Dimension of Veteran Transition:
International Best Practices and the Way Forward**

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Technical Abbreviations

BRC	Ban Righ Centre
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
DCSM	Director of Casualty Support Management
DND	Department of National Defence
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs (Australia)
IVMF	Institute for Veterans and Military Families
OSI	Operational Stress Injury
MST	Military Sexual Trauma
POE	Prince's Operation Entrepreneur
RMC	Royal Military College of Canada
SCAN	Second Career Assistance Network
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
US	United States of America
VAC	Veterans Affairs Canada
VTN	Veterans Transition Network
WIIS	Women in International Security

Key Insights

Gaps between service providers and within service provision is apparent

Recent years have seen a surge in attention to veteran's mental health and physical rehabilitation in Canada. However, clear gaps in service remain, particularly in regards to specific programs for female veterans and a consideration of unique gender issues. Collaboration between sectors, jurisdictions, governments, and service organizations also remains slow and difficult to achieve.

Women experience transition in unique ways

Female personnel not only experience their military service differently than men, but their post-service transition is also markedly dissimilar. Women's transition is complicated by the unique gendered experiences, trauma, and issues women must confront in transition. Transition is also dependent on the role, position, or job held in active service. Transition is therefore easier for some, and more challenging for others.

Tension between recognizing gender and recognizing the role of the individual

Many transition programs, including the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Career Transition programs, focus solely on the role an individual performed during service in order to formulate a plan to address transition needs, regardless of gender. This approach fails to consider the unique gendered experiences of service as well as the gender roles and norms that inevitably shape transition.

The number of service provider organizations is overwhelming

There are more than 160+ organizations in Canada offering aid to veterans in some form. The sheer number of service providers overwhelms and confuses veterans. The great number of similar good-will organizations results in the duplication of efforts. Furthermore, efforts to help are compartmentalized as funding becomes spread thin across providers. This results in many players, but ineffectual service provision.

Social connection, peer support, and a sense of community are required to support veterans in transition

Exiting the military is a confusing and isolating experience. Service providers and veterans emphasized the need for peer support and a sense of community to ease the stress of transition. Establishing connections to one's community is also vital for veterans' to feel they are "serving" in a new meaningful way.

Transition service providers operate with a reactive mentality

Service providers, such as the CAF and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) do not actively seek veterans to engage in their programs. Rather, transition programs are predominately voluntary rather than mandatory. As such, veterans often leave the military unaware of services, benefits, educational and employment opportunities, and counselling options.

Veterans need space and time to "re-boot" and learn a new self

Veterans exiting the military continue to operate in "warrior mode". PTSD and adrenaline are often mistaken for ambition, drive, and stamina. Veterans are not given the space to relax and consider their mission experiences before entering the next stage of their lives and careers. Transition is

also made difficult by a loss of identity. Consequently, veterans need to define who they are and what their personal mission is without their military units. When this is not recognized and supported veterans fall through the cracks.

Female veterans are uncomfortable being identified as “women”

Female veterans learn to become a soldier in a male-dominated environment. Post-service female veterans feel unease with being identified as women. This reality engenders a refusal to acknowledge and discuss gendered experiences, such as military sexual trauma.

Greater research of female veterans is needed

There is a lack of academic research on female Canadian veterans, particularly in regards to post-service outcomes. Key stakeholders highlighted the need for greater research into this specific population.

Civilian perceptions of who is the “ideal” veteran affects transition

Public perceptions of who is the typical veteran silences marginalized veterans’ experiences and needs, such as female veterans. Simultaneously, perceptions in the general public of what veterans require to transition (i.e. emphasis on physical rehabilitation over vocational rehabilitation) elicits homogeneity of programs and gaps in service provision.

Formal mentoring is hard to establish, but informal mentoring is increasing

Establishing formal and sustainable mentoring programs is an arduous and complex undertaking. Informal mentoring, in contrast, is organic and elicits greater trust and sustainability. Many modes of informal mentoring are thriving amongst female veterans, whether it be within the Forces, public service, or private sector.

We must begin gender-mainstreaming existing infrastructure while also undertaking new gender-specific policies

Institutional and societal gender changes can only occur if existing policies are re-imagined, rather than replaced with gender mainstreaming initiatives. However, we must also recognize the need for targeted gender-specific policies and programs to begin to address gaps in services.

Opening Remarks

A Queen's University researcher opened the workshop by welcoming the diversity of participants from various sectors, all of whom have a stake in promoting the successful transition of Canada's veterans, both male and female. The researcher introduced the workshop topic by noting that while the Department of National Defence (DND) has recently announced a commitment to increasing resources within the military to aid the "seamless" transition of veterans to civilian life, consideration of gender-specific services and programs is notably absent, due in part to "decades old policies" and the slow integration of gender mainstreaming initiatives. As such, the researcher emphasized the overarching purpose of the day's proceedings: to put a spotlight on women veterans and their unique transition challenges, which is not only overlooked in government policy but also within academic research. Such a focus is of crucial importance, in part due to Canada's commitment to UNSCR 1325 and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) goal to increase the number of female personnel by 1% annually, but particularly because of the well-documented reality that women veterans face a more difficult adjustment to civilian life than their male counterparts. The researcher noted that women veterans' transition is often compounded by a higher prevalence of mental health issues and family challenges. The result of such interlocking factors are difficulty achieving a high quality of life and acquiring meaningful employment, the latter of which is considered one of the most important aspects to personnel as they transition. The researcher emphasized the theme of mentorship running throughout the day's proceedings, both as a concept and a practical tool for veterans to facilitate transition to the civilian sector. To open the workshop, the researcher noted that panel topics, presented by various stakeholders and service providers, were focused on a multiplicity of programs, challenges, and best practices within veteran transition in order to spark discussion on how best to bridge gaps in service and move forward with the "gender dimension" of transition in mind.

Opening Keynote Address

A government official provided the keynote address. The government official began their address by sharing brief vignettes of the rich history of women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The government official emphasized that women began serving in the military over one-hundred years ago, as nurses and medical assistants. The government official further stressed the contribution of women to the Canadian military has been rich – highlighting women’s service during World War II, the Korean War, and during more recent conflicts, such as Afghanistan. The government official also highlighted changes to policy within the CAF to be more inclusive of women – such as the enrollment of women at the Royal Military College (RMC) in 1979, the introduction of women to combat roles in 1987, and the decision to move towards full integration of women in all military occupations in 1988. However, women’s progress has not been steady and without setbacks. Consequently, the government official emphasized that much improvement is still required.

In discussing women’s advances in the Canadian military, the government official drew on their own experiences as a health officer in various roles and ranks in the health and medical services of the CAF. The government official noted that while they were surprised to find themselves as the first woman officer in their field, they did not find integration to be an issue. The government official further noted that the gender balance in the medical services is fairly balanced – women are attracted to the medical services due to similar training as the civilian services, ensuring that transition from the military sector to the civilian sector is easily achieved. The government official noted, however, that this ease of inclusion and integration is not the same across all trades. The government official detailed how the increase of women in the military has continued to be a challenge. In 2015, 18% of the Canadian military’s intake was female; however, despite this achievement, the government official noted that the military is failing to retain women at the same rate and the number of female reserves has dropped to 14-15% as of 2016 (from 20% in previous years). Further, while women have attained significant positions of rank, such as General and Chief Warrant Officer, the government official argues that improvements in many areas is necessary to achieve successful integration in all ranks and professions of the military. The government official asserts that to address these issues, a cultural shift must occur in the CAF – it needs to be more flexible, inclusive, and more proactive in the recruitment of female personnel.

Turning to the topic of veteran transition, the government official suggests successful transition is dependent on a multitude of factors, such as an individual’s trade, financial state, family situation, physical and mental health, ability to access and obtain medical services, and the presence of a strong social network. The government official argues that the issue of successful transition is based not on gender, but rather on the aforementioned factors, suggesting that an individual will struggle with transition, regardless if they are male or female. The government official further suggests that successful transition can be aided by the military particularly in the areas of support and follow-up. The government official stresses that personnel will succeed in their transition endeavours if aided by a strong pool of support. The military builds strong connections, relationships, and friendships; this social network becomes severed as one leaves. As such, the government official argues a network of relationships and social support needs to continue post-service. Further, the government official suggests that transition can be a confusing experience. Not only are personnel confronted with a challenging bureaucracy, but the government official

also asserts that there are “too many players from too many organizations,” which results in a bewildering landscape of service provision for Canada’s veterans.

The government official ended their talk by noting that while mentorship is not actively practiced in the CAF, they would not have been able to achieve success without coaching and support from many individuals. This suggests that informal relationships of mentoring and support are already actively being practiced within Canada’s military and military communities.

Panel I - Government Initiatives for Veteran Services

This panel provided a contextual overview of services available to transitioning women veterans. The panel was chaired by a public service representative. The panel provided a description of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) transition structure and services, such as national and base-specific transition efforts. The panel also provided an overview of non-profit transition efforts, specifically the Prince's Operation Entrepreneur (POE) program.

A government official began by noting that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has a dedicated team of professionals that supports transitioning members with base-specific programs and services. The government official stated that such programs and services assist CAF members by recognizing how their experiences, skills, and competencies, regardless of their gender, relates to where they may fit in a civilian labour market. The career transition services offered by the CAF are available to personnel throughout their career and all services are at present voluntary. These services include career and education counselling, career transition seminars (SCAN), career transition workshops, and long term planning seminars. The government official reiterated that all programs and services are voluntary, stating that they do not seek out transitioning personnel and veterans; rather, transitioning personnel must come to them. The government official also stated that the workshops contain a myriad of information. As such, personnel are encouraged to come early in their careers to seminars, such as SCAN. The government official also detailed the initiatives the CAF is undertaking with third parties within industry and corporate Canada, noting the interest of third parties in hiring veterans is growing at an exponential rate. The government official notes that approximately 1000 employers reach out to the CAF on an annual basis expressing their interest in hiring veterans. As such, the CAF has an important role in educating various businesses and partners of the advantages in employing a veteran.

The government official noted several studies have shown that female veterans see a decline in employment earnings post-release, which is not seen at the same rate for men. This decline in earnings is likely attributable to women's lower labour force participation, higher rates of women working part-time, occupation or trade while employed in the Forces, and lower average pension due to lower earnings pre-release and shorter length of service. However, the government official reaffirms that transition must focus on the role of the member while in the CAF and not gender. The government official does declare the CAF must, however, remain cognizant of equality factors post-release, which is why the CAF continues to inform and educate employers on the skills and experiences of military members, regardless of gender. The government official detailed the initiatives the CAF is undertaking to achieve this, such as the internal restructuring of current SCAN seminars, the introduction of innovative means to educate and promote career transition, designing a military-to-civilian occupation map, greater engagement with multiple federal departments on veteran hiring, and greater connections with third parties in the realms of employment, transition, education, and pilot programs. The government official concluded by noting CAF members have invaluable leadership skills and capabilities that deserve recognition, both within the public service and private businesses, thus the emphasis on continuous engagement with various stakeholders to improve and innovate transition endeavours.

A representative of a veteran service organization discussed the Prince's Operation Entrepreneur (POE) program, an initiative that helps transitioning members and veterans start their own businesses through one-day workshops and boot camps. POE's aim is to make a positive impact

on Canada's economy and society by supporting transitioning military personnel through the power of entrepreneurship. The POE program offers education and tools for transitioning members to build confidence, develop a network, and start their own successful businesses. In addition to the economic impact of the POE program on new businesses and job creation, the representative notes a central focus of the POE program is to help transitioning military personnel build resilience in a very challenging period of change. The representative suggests entrepreneurship is an excellent option for transitioning personnel, primarily due to the loss of identity personnel feel upon exit from the military. The representative suggests being a business owner is one means to restore confidence and develop a sense of self. Importantly, the representative notes that one of the greatest impacts on post-service members is the loss of network and community; personnel feel lost when they are no longer part of the military community. The POE program, the representative argues, makes it their mission to create a new community for military members, based around entrepreneurship. The program brings people who have served together and similarly, are facing analogous challenges as entrepreneurs.

The representative highlighted several successes of the POE program. Since beginning in 2012, 177 businesses have been started by 289 boot camp alumni. Significantly, the representative notes 25% of boot camp alumni are women, compared to 15% serving in the CAF and 13% in the veteran population. The representative suggests entrepreneurship and self-employment are extremely attractive for female veterans due to the flexibility such a career affords, particularly as female veterans report that their main activity post-release is care-giving (of children or other dependents). The representative notes this is evident in the make-up of workshop and boot camp attendees. The program is often attended by families and 37-40% of alumni plan to start a business with their spouses.

The representative also notes that a central aspect of the program is ongoing skills development and support. Veteran entrepreneurs are provided short-term business coaching, access to the Canadian Veteran Business Directory, free corporate legal advice, and networking links to community partners and mentoring organizations. The program measures attendees before and after to assuage success. The representative reports veteran alumni demonstrate greater confidence, skills, and resilience after having attended a POE workshop or boot camp. The representative does note, however, that the POE program does not yet measure success by gender, but plans to do so in the future.

The representative suggests governmental bodies, such as Veteran's Affairs Canada (VAC), need to relay to transitioning personnel that self-employment and entrepreneurship are fruitful career options. Highlighting U.S. based research conducted at the IVMF, the representative notes not only are U.S. veterans more likely to own a business than non-veterans, but veteran entrepreneurs out-earn non-veteran entrepreneurs and demonstrate high levels of good decision-making in stressful or chaotic environments, confidence, and independence – all traits found in service members and veterans. However, the representative notes the research has found that female veterans are *less likely* than nonveteran females to be self-employed. As such, The representative concludes by suggesting that there is a need not only for greater program funding to support entrepreneurial initiatives, but also for academic research to show the impact of entrepreneurship on veterans, and especially on women veteran entrepreneurs, particularly as it relates to their motivations, challenges, and needs.

Panel II – Military Context and Mentorship

The second panel was chaired an academic researcher and provided an overview of female military personnel in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), CAF culture, women veterans, and mentorship best practices and benefits. The academic researcher noted navigating the CAF and post-service cultures can be a challenge if personnel are lacking the skills and knowledge of a particular sub-culture. Moreover, the academic researcher also notes there is often disparity between what a particular institution or organization espouses, and what they actually practice. As such the academic researcher suggests that mentorship, particularly informal mentorship, can be very effective in successfully arming veterans with the ability to navigate a constantly changing institutional and bureaucratic terrain.

The panel opened with a presentation by a government official on the gendered dimension of attrition, retention, and transition in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The government official began by noting while the years of service in the regular force and attrition rates up until year 19 are fairly similar between men and women afterwards something occurs: women start leaving the CAF at a higher rate. The government official also notes that since the mid-2000s, voluntary attrition has been consistently higher for men, whereas medical attrition has been consistently higher for women. The government official further notes that when CAF members were surveyed regarding their reasons for leaving, their appeared little gender difference in regards to work satisfaction and organizational factors. However, women were more likely to indicate that they were staying with the CAF because of satisfaction with pay and benefits. Significantly, women considering leaving indicated that they were more likely to stay if posting decisions were improved; meaning, if postings more greatly considered their preferences, geographic stability, and what's best for their family.

The government official also noted a 2012 CAF exit survey indicated the feeling of accomplishing meaningful work, the career management system, and time available for family/personal relationships, and attachment to one's community, were the greatest reasons for influencing leave decisions for both sexes. The biggest gender differences were in regards to greater proportions of men being dissatisfied with job aspects, training and career progression; in contrast greater proportions of women were dissatisfied with aspects related to their work unit and their immediate supervisor's leadership. The government official also presented findings from research focused on why women leave the military. The government official noted the primary reason women leave is in regards to family and work-life balance. Female personnel also noted dissatisfaction with elements of career advancement, such as the lack of women in senior ranks, unfavourable postings, and maternity leave impacting advancement opportunities. As well, personnel noted dissatisfaction with what they perceived to be a male dominated military culture.

Finally, the government official shared data that focused on men and women's transition. The government official notes that fewer women than men report an easy adjustment to civilian life. More women than men report mental health issues and comorbid mental and physical health issues. Significantly, easier adjustment to civilian life, for both men and women, is linked to higher rates of education, higher mastery (perceived control over life events), and fewer mental health and physical health conditions. Finally, the government official notes the odds of easy adjustment to civilian life were lower for those dissatisfied with their job, leisure, family, finances, and for those who reported high life stress. The government official argues that satisfaction with employment

and financial situation may be particularly important for those released earlier in their career who must find civilian employment. The government official notes all of these are factors to consider when determining how best to help veterans make a successful adjustment to civilian life.

The government official concluded her talk by providing some main take aways of the research findings presented. Importantly, the proportion of releases that are medical has increased over time, particularly for women. Additionally, women tend to medically release earlier in their careers. The government official suggests there is a need for further research to examine this reality, particularly investigation into differences in medical release reasons between men and women in the CAF. The government official also suggests that there is a need to study the “0 year” attrition rate for women, especially given the focus on increasing the representation of women in the CAF by 1% per year. The government official concluded by suggesting the consideration of sex differences going forward can facilitate more targeted programs and services for transitioning members and veterans. The government official states the intent of the CAF is for positive inclusion and diversity to usher in a new era for Canada’s military.

An academic researcher opened their talk on transition challenges and sexual violence in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) by posing three questions for reflection: 1) what are the barriers to gender-based reform in the military? 2) what are the barriers to successful gender-based transition? And 3) what are the barriers to female veterans speaking out? The academic researcher notes much of their work has focused on drawing attention to the barriers that cross the military and civilian sectors. They note not only is the military a highly gendered institution, but civilian society is as well. Thus, transitioning from one gendered institution to another consists of the constant renegotiation of gender norms and roles. The academic researcher thus argues there is danger in formulating spaces, sectors, and policies as gender neutral or gender blind: doing so risks recreating gender inequality.

The academic researcher suggests that we are at a great moment of opportunity with initiatives such as the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, UNSCR 1325, and growing awareness and inclusion of gender-based reforms. However, the academic researcher asserts more needs to be done. They note there is a growing discussion around sexual harassment and assault in the civilian world. The academic researcher seeks to see how such discussions and reforms can be fed into military efforts to address the same issues. This suggestion connects to one of the academic researcher’s central arguments: a gender-based approach to military to civilian transition needs to be linked. The academic researcher notes other academics have documented how challenging it is to achieve change in regards to Operation Honour. This, in part, is due to how challenging it is to elicit internally directed culture change. As well, the academic researcher contends internally directed culture change, particularly within the military, is sporadic and inconsistent. Further, operational priorities often supersede all other endeavours. Thus, change lacks resources, expertise, and ultimately depends on strong leadership. Thus, the academic researcher suggests to more broadly change military gender culture, we must work much more across military and civilian lines and take advantage of the pool of expertise that lies outside the CAF.

The academic researcher also argues that while more gender-based reforms are needed, we need to go beyond the model of simply “adding women”, arguing a critique of the gendered culture of the military goes beyond sex differences. Significantly, the academic researcher reasons we need

to think about which gendered experiences are given value and privileged – and which are silenced. The academic researcher suggests it is harder to see and recognize certain gendered experiences because they are outside “the norm”. It is arguable, the academic researcher states, that gendered experiences associated with masculinity are most comprehensible. This is important as experiences that are less visible or invisible are harder to address and therefore there is a risk of revictimization.

The academic researcher concluded their discussion by suggesting there are many barriers that prevent female soldiers from speaking out about their experiences. The academic researcher acknowledges we not only need to look at barriers within the military and civilian society, but also need to deconstruct who is recognized as a soldier and veteran and therefore whose experiences are validated. The academic researcher suggests this is connected to gender dynamics more broadly. The academic researcher stressed this, since this can have ramifications for female veterans as they transition post-service. Civilian society has certain assumptions about who a veteran is; thus, female veterans have difficulty expressing who they are and finding space in their communities. As a final note, the academic researcher suggests we need to keep in mind the gender norms and dynamics both within the military and within the civilian world, and how this may affect transition. Going forward, the academic researcher recommends continued gender mainstreaming of existing programs as well as new tailor-made gender programs and initiatives. As a final note, the academic researcher reiterates collaboration across the military and civilian spheres is key to achieving gender goals and facilitating successful transition.

A veteran service provider representative followed with a presentation on mentorship for female veterans. The representative acknowledged a lot of time and stress could potentially have been avoided if they had an ally as they navigated between the military and civilian spheres. The representative suggests the central challenge of a mentorship program is that formal mentorship is too idealistic. Relationships must be simple and organic for success to follow. Mentorship therefore must come in a variety of forms. Drawing on her experience in the clinical setting, The representative argues a partner, ally or mentor in some form (informal or otherwise) is often conducive to healing and moving forward. The representative refers to this as the therapeutic alliance – when there is trust, partnership, and a sense of support, the relationship can be transformational. The representative suggests the source of this mentorship can come from a variety of sources, whether it be family or an individual with a similar experience to one’s own. Applying this to female veterans, the representative argues women helping women is incredibly powerful. A formal mentorship program may be established, but The representative suggests that clear communication, clear expectations, and consistent follow through is key for such relationships to continue. The representative thus ended her talk by acknowledging that while mentorship is important, implementation remains hard. Therefore, the representative reiterates the importance of support and mentorship in a variety of forms and the need for continual support of female veterans as they move through their careers and transition into the civilian sphere post-service.

The panel concluded with a presentation by a civil society organization representative, who presented on the Ban Righ Centre’s Mentorship Program at Queen’s University. The representative detailed the important work the Ban Righ Centre (BRC) has done as a student service provider dedicated to women and transforming women’s lives for the past 43 years. The representative notes that the BRC is an important women-only space, as women’s lives are very different than

men's and as such a space and service that is tailored to women's lives and their experiences is of fundamental importance. Turning to the topic of mentorship, the representative emphasizes mentorship incites reciprocal personal learning and is key for socialization. Those engaged in a mentorship relationship benefit from the development of key skills, such as problem solving, communication, conflict resolution, goal setting, and networking. Importantly, the representative notes mentorship can aid socialization, meaning, those engaged in mentorship develop greater knowledge of organizational or institutional politics, histories, goals, and values. The representative emphasizes being introduced to fresh perspectives can be a transformative experience.

Building on previously presentations, the representative notes it is the informal or spontaneous mentoring relationships that are often the most significant. The representative notes informal interactions are key to developing trust bonds. From this a fruitful and organic relationship can grow. Therefore, the representative notes the BRC's program places follow-up entirely in the students' hands. Thus, the representative notes the importance of providing a space for spontaneous conversations and relationships to develop. The representative concluded their talk by noting a sense of community, often amongst those who have the same experiences or are facing the same challenges, can ease feelings of insecurity, isolation, and result in greater confidence. The representative thus urges the consideration of a space where open, honest, and meaningful conversations may flourish.

Featured Lunch Speaker

An academic researcher presented a talk on mentorship by drawing upon experiences in Women in International Security (WIIS) Canada. The academic researcher notes early in their graduate career; they came to realize the unique challenges they faced as a woman in a male-dominated field. WIIS offers the opportunity for academic women to come together to share their experiences and troubleshoot challenges through mentorship opportunities. The academic researcher notes mentorship is important to women, since women have an innate understanding of how complicated navigating a male-dominated sphere can be. Women are better able to perceive and acutely understand the challenges that *women* are facing. The academic researcher notes it has been through such relationships they have become better equipped to respond to gender issues in the professional academic sphere.

The academic researcher notes that one of the benefits of establishing a formal mentorship program, as demanding as that may be, is mentees often become mentors over time. From the formal mentorship setting, as evidenced by WIIS's success, a productive network can be built, and mentorship renewal can occur as mentees move into the position of mentor. From this, a flourishing professional network can be established. The academic researcher notes that often mentorship can be so challenging because it is espoused as valuable, but is not practiced, particularly in the military and academic environments.

The academic researcher asserts mentorship relationships are not "one size fits all". The academic researcher suggests that there is as much to learn from an individual who is more advanced in their professional development as there is from your peers. As such, the academic researcher urges female veterans to make connections with multiple sources: individuals you aspire to, and individuals who are exactly where you are. The academic researcher also asserts conversations across sectors, while challenging, are also of crucial importance in developing one's ability to understand and navigate different spheres. As a final note, the academic researcher proposes what is key to successful mentorship is being able to identify what your needs are and to ask for the help that addresses those specific needs. Mentorship, the academic researcher emphasizes, is a two-way street.

Panel III – Whole of Canada Approach

Chaired by an academic researcher, this panel brought together perspectives on transition from various stakeholders, including the federal government, the province of Ontario, and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), complimented by a perspective on alternative approaches to veteran transition and healing.

The panel began with a presentation by a researcher on the topic of utilizing farming and outdoor activities, known as “green care,” to ease veteran transition to civilian life and heal from operational stress injuries (OSIs). Green care, notes the researcher, is an approach to mental and social health which includes outdoor activities, agriculture, animal assisted therapies, horticulture, and gardening. The researcher notes that post-service, veterans often struggle with a loss of confidence and self-esteem, particularly around their inability to translate acquired skills to the civilian sphere. Compounding this, are stress injuries, anxiety, and mental health and physical health challenges. Green care, notes The researcher, has been shown to improve confidence, pride in self, reduce anxiety, and increase social connection. Additionally, the researcher notes veteran farming initiatives are a means to continue the sense of serving one’s community, which, as noted by several presenters, is of crucial significance to veterans’ post-service. The researcher further emphasizes the green care approach is not a novel one; veterans were encouraged to seek agricultural and fishing opportunities post-WWI and WWII.

The researcher suggests interest in green initiatives is growing. However, the researcher argues making the connection between employment, skills, building, stress, and recovery has not been made. Green care is an approach that considers transition holistically – from career advancement to overcoming OSI. The researcher further suggests that green care can be the first step towards healing. Veterans require a space to digest their service and essentially rewire how they think and function. Green care offers a safe environment to do this while engaging in tasks that provide a sense of control to build emotional resilience.

Despite these positive findings, the researcher notes there are barriers to implementing green care initiatives. Particularly the reality that many veteran service providers seek new research to study the effectiveness of green care. The researcher suggests this is counterproductive, as there is already a large amount of data supporting this approach in existence. The researcher concluded by noting the most successful farming or outdoor initiatives she has witnessed are the entities that are led by veterans in conjunction with a civilian partner. Thus, the researcher makes a strong case for collaborative veteran-civilian initiatives, echoing suggestions that communication and connection across the military and civilian communities is a key element of emotional and professional transition.

A government representative discussed the structure of employment training services provided by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Employment and Training Division. The representative detailed how the ministry operates a network across the province of Ontario, focusing specifically on building a highly skilled workforce, but also supporting the needs of those who are re-entering the labour market, or require retraining and skills development. The representative notes that the division is an excellent resource for transitioning veterans. It provides services such as resume writing, training incentives, career counselling, apprenticeships, and educational preparation. The representative also notes the division offers highly individualized

service provision. The representative notes that their employment service program is a highly flexible toolkit, which can be tailored to an individual's specific needs, skills, and interests. The representative also notes the Employment and Training Division acts as a "gateway" for clients, working effectively to link individuals seeking work with employment partners in various communities, as well as training and placing individuals in high demand occupations. To conclude her presentation, the representative encouraged veterans to seek her ministry's services. The representative further notes that there are many placement opportunities for veterans with transferable skills, and her ministry actively works to establish provisions to ensure veterans can quickly transition to their chosen sector of employment without re-training.

A veteran service provider representative presented on the work the Veterans Transition Network (VTN) does to aid veterans who have experienced trauma. The representative described how VTN came to be established in 1998 as a support group that met several times a week. The representative notes the network has evolved to its present format of a ten-day group based counselling retreat. The representative also notes the VTN is one of the only organizations that offers women-only services and programs for female veterans. Presently, VTN runs one women's program a year in Ontario and is seeking to expand, such as providing French language groups. Describing the group-based retreat, the representative notes the program is supported by several mental health professionals, such as registered psychologists, and features returning program graduates. The program is based outside of urban areas, in a relaxing natural environment. The representative notes that due to the intense group-based discussions, utilizing nature as a means to de-stress is crucial. The program includes three phases: 1) trust building (between peers and program leads); 2) tools for symptom management; and 3) consolidation.

At each phase veterans learn how to manage their trauma with the support of their peers. The representative notes that many participants' express feelings of an inability to communicate their emotions, and further, their trauma is compounded by a fear to address or confront their experiences. As well, the representative notes veterans often express feelings of betrayal by the military, especially due to difficulties transitioning. Drawing on data drawn from 17 groups, The representative notes significant gender differences. Principally, the representative notes men are excited to come together as a unit to resolve issues. Women, in contrast, are anxious to be together with other military women. Significantly, the representative notes the first women-only session undertaken in 2012 was difficult, as female veterans were resistant to discussion. During service women were required to connect with men to feel part of the group; thus, when women come together alone, the representative notes, they feel fear in identifying as women, rather than as soldiers. The representative notes women often express low self-esteem and a lack of pride in being female, suggesting this is often the result of their military training within a male-dominated sphere. As well, the representative shared most women have experienced military sexual trauma (MST) and are hesitant to share their experiences. However, the retreat often enables women to open up and share experiences. The representative concluded her talk by noting that while women are at first resistant to women-only discussions, by the end of the retreats women express joy and pride in being female. The representative suggests the comraderie and sharing of experiences by women, with women, enables female veterans to continue with their lives post-retreat with feelings of pride in themselves and their military experiences.

A government official concluded the panel with a discussion on Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)

health care and outcomes. The government official began their presentation by acknowledging how important it is that there were not only women, but men participating in this important workshop. The government official emphasizes the issues being discussed are not “women’s” issues, but rather societal issues. As such, the government official stresses the importance of trying to understand each other. In describing their own transition experience from the military to the public service, the government official notes their own personal challenges. Despite integration of the military and the public service sector, the government official notes transitioning was still a shock. The government official notes this was in part due to the male-dominated environment of the military, which has been the norm throughout their career. Further, the government official notes the siloed nature of the public service, such as the lack of information sharing. As such, the government official notes joining the public service required them to learn and adapt to very different institutional norms. The government official’s comments echo the challenges of transitioning from the military setting to others, as expressed by previous presenters.

The government official provided information on what is termed the “well-being model” at VAC. It includes seven aspects: health (functioning well physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually); a purpose in life (engaged in meaningful activities); financial security; housing (safe and stable); family and community (veterans are in mutually supportive relationships); identity (veterans are understood and valued by Canadians); and resilience (veterans are able to adapt, manage, and cope). The government official notes any policy actions VAC undertakes are done so with this model in mind and as such are veteran-centric. The government official does however, note seamless service provision is required to achieve this, whether it be between VAC and an organization or between organizations. The government official underscores VAC has been struggling with seamless service provision for decades.

Turning to the topic of veteran outcomes, the government official highlights key findings from several studies conducted within the last decade. Significantly, The government official notes female veterans experience higher rates of injury early in military training, are more likely to be in administrative occupations at their time of release, are more likely than their male counterparts to require help in their daily lives post-release, are less likely to be engaged in the labour market in the year following release, experience higher rates of disability, are more involved in caring activities, and experience lower earnings and income post-release. The government official also highlights female veterans are less likely than male veterans to agree the skills they acquired in the military are the same or similar to those required for civilian jobs.

The government official notes several important VAC initiatives as a result of these findings. Notably, the government official suggests addressing health concerns is made difficult by the jurisdictional divide at the provincial and federal levels. However, The government official underscores VAC is working to focus on preventing work disability, as it is more prevalent for veterans than for Canadians, and especially more prevalent among female veterans. The government official also stresses the need to examine specific labour market barriers experienced by women. Although, the government official notes the challenge in undertaking such research, such as small sample sizes and crucially, the lack of funding to collect data. Therefore, The government official notes VAC is currently working with Statistics Canada on the feasibility of identifying veterans on some of their products. The government official stresses that until VAC is able to acquire more data, VAC will be unable to make the best policy choices to serve Canada’s

veterans. To conclude, the government official expressed their frustration in the inability to close the gap between service providers and between services. The government official notes the number of organizations in Canada offering help is astounding, but overwhelming. The government official's final comments suggest the need to bridge gaps between such service providers to ensure the best possible means to achieve veteran well-being.

Panel IV – International Landscape, Best Practices, and Challenges

A veteran service provider representative chaired the final panel of the workshop. This panel provided insight into current initiatives that are considered “best practices” in the United States, Canada, and beyond. In addition, challenges such as sustaining funding, and measuring success for program evaluation were considered.

An academic researcher opened the panel by providing a contextual overview of the policies and efforts of three countries, Sweden, Denmark, and Australia in enabling a smooth transition of their armed forces personnel into the civilian workforce upon completion of their military careers. The researcher notes that while the approaches to veteran transition in the three countries discussed are unique, they measure successful transition by outcomes in continuity of healthcare, finding employment and social connectedness, rather than gender. In Sweden, the researcher notes the potential of civilian partnerships between the military and employers to ensure veterans are aware of their career options. Educational and vocational training is also offered by Denmark. Their use of a customised transition plan and support team consisting of psychological, physical and vocational counsellors is integral.

Particularly interesting findings that may be relevant in the Canadian case include Australia's Female Veterans Policy Forum (the Forum). The researcher notes the Forum was established after the Australian government recognised the fact that female veterans have distinct concerns. As such, female veterans are currently being given a strong enough voice through existing consultative fora. The researcher also notes the Forum provides attendees the opportunity to discuss the unique experiences of female veterans and veteran families, the impact of military service, and how the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) services could be improved to better support their needs. The researcher notes the Forum has resulted in ongoing research related to several issues female veterans have identified as important, such as mothers serving in Middle Eastern operations. This research has resulted in the Australian government developing greater resources to assist deploying and deployed mothers.

The researcher notes that in Australia, we see the importance of academic and scholarly research in affecting policy, particularly regarding female veterans, an area largely unexplored. The researcher concluded her discussion by noting that more research is needed into the effectiveness of the policies and efforts of each country. While it is clear that veterans, regardless of nationality, are experiencing barriers to transitioning into civilian life, especially those with health concerns, medical, financial and social solutions to the challenges within the transition process can indeed be sought within the wider military/veterans community.

A veteran service provider representative provided reflections on the U.S. based program REBOOT Combat Recovery. REBOOT is a twelve-week trauma healing course, designed to support veterans and their families experiencing PTSD. The representative notes the program is aptly named, as soldiers living with PTSD and seeking to move on from their combat experiences, are quite literally “rebooting” or “rewiring” their systems. The representative notes the REBOOT organization has significantly demonstrated transitioning veterans consistently “fall through the cracks.” The representative notes military to civilian transition is especially difficult – veterans are required to effectively learn a new language and way of being, while dealing with significant trauma. The representative asserts that within the military, the only factor that matters is the

mission. The representative therefore notes a central component of REBOOT is providing space for veterans to learn how to think for themselves. Often, the representative notes, veterans do not realize they can create their own missions post-service.

Turning to female veterans, the representative describes how challenging it is for such women to open up about their experiences and share in a group setting. The representative reports women express their hesitation in sharing with other women initially. The representative suggests this hesitation is due in part to the nature of the military: women are taught to become one of their male colleagues. Thus, female experiences and concerns, such as health, sexual trauma, and other challenges, become silenced. However, the representative notes throughout the process women feel more comfortable sharing with their experiences, once they recognize allies in their female peers. As a final note, the representative reiterates the reality that veterans are often forgotten – they are more likely to be underemployed, homeless, and dealing with mental and physical health challenges than the general population.

A veteran service provider representative presented on the METSpouse program of Canada Company. To begin their discussion, the representative notes Canada is much more progressive in its gendered perspective than the United States, pointing to the very recent inclusion of women in the U.S. combat arms as evidence that America is lagging behind its international partners. However, the representative suggests that while Canada is doing well in regards to its gendered policies, where it is lacking is in regards to the public's awareness and appreciation of the military. The mission in Afghanistan did a great deal to raise patriotism amongst the general public, but The representative notes this appreciation was restricted to certain locales. As such, the representative notes Canada Company is attempting to more greatly make the military and Canada's veteran population visible, asserting a key element of this is corporate awareness.

Following the success of the MET Program, Canada Company introduced METSpouse. The METSpouse program is the only military spouse transition program available world-wide. The representative emphasizes the importance of this program – often spouses are forgotten, but they too require transition as their partners are posted. The representative suggests the biggest issue is availability of work in remote locations. Canada Company is therefore endeavouring to make connections that will open up greater opportunities in remote locales. To conclude, The representative suggests spouses and female veterans have many valuable skills that are transferable, alike to any male soldier or officer. What is needed, the representative asserts, is the necessary tools to identify those skills so that they may be taken to a new career or mode of employment. As a final note, the representative urges veterans and the general population to share with employers the reality that you are getting a valuable employee in a military spouse.

The panel concluded with a presentation by a private sector representative. The representative discussed their own military and transition experience. The representative notes the central reason they left the military is they came to the realization that it would be an incredibly hard career for a stable family life. The representative notes that leaving the military was an extremely terrifying moment. The representative stresses they lacked many important life skills necessary to successfully transition. The representative emphasizes that at this time of their life, and throughout the duration of their career, they could not have succeeded without mentorship and the support of their peers. As such, the representative highlights the mentorship work the Treble Victor Group

(TVG) undertakes in the business sector. The representative notes their success in not only in creating informal mentoring “matches” and growing membership of the group, but also of the number of veterans who have found employment through this program.

Turning to their work with PwC, the representative notes the desire to attract veterans is highly valued. The representative underlines the skills veterans potentially bring to careers post service: diversity, the ability to cope with change, and significantly, true leadership. The representative stresses the ability to lead is not something that can be taught and suggests this unique skill should be more greatly recognized in the private sector. As a corollary to this, the representative notes the needs of veterans also require greater recognition in Canadian society. The representative makes the important point that all too often interest in the military is highest during times of conflict, but it is in fact during peacetime that veterans require the most support and help. As such, initiatives such as the Invictus Games are of vital importance in continually highlighting the veteran population in Canada.

Concluding Remarks

A Queen's University researcher provided the closing remarks for the workshop. The researcher began by providing a recap of the topics the day covered, from the brief history of women in the Canadian military in Canada, to international best practices, to alternative approaches to veteran care and healing. The researcher asserts many presentations provided a window into where the nation currently stands in regards to veterans' transition, noting significant progress has been made. The researcher suggests there has been steady movement in the development of programs that are addressing veterans' issues, such as housing, PTSD, and second career training. The researcher further notes the days' proceedings have indicated the interlocking connections between mental health, employment, food security, and family. Further, the researcher states many of the presentations provided indications on how to measure outcomes and success, as well as demonstrating the value of a social support system and mentorship.

Despite these positives, the researcher notes clear issues remain. There continues to be difficulty in transitioning military skills to the civilian workforce. The duplication of efforts to serve veterans and aid transition has created a confusing and overwhelming sea of service provision. Funding remains an issue, in part due to siloed efforts and an abundance of organizations attempting to achieve the same goal. The researcher also notes the issue of who is the ideal veteran as perceived by the public often leaves female veterans behind. Veterans, female and male, continue to struggle with confusion around identity, purpose, and how to achieve a meaningful life. The researcher also asserts there are barriers between policy as it is stated and policy as it is enacted. Similarly, The researcher notes successful mentorship continues to be a challenge – it is espoused as a value but in practice not realized. The researcher also notes the demand for original research is suppressing valuable data already available.

The researcher notes the day's discussions have brought forward possible solutions to these issues. It begins, the researcher notes, with debunking myths of the female soldier, recognizing accessibility to services physically and virtually is a challenge, and acknowledging a gender-based approach to veteran transition is vital. There is value, the researcher notes, in the gendered perspectives and aspects that are minimally understood and nominally discussed. The researcher concluded by emphasizing that we will only be successful in addressing female veteran transition if we begin from where such women are – whether that be in remote locations, jobs, or in the home.