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Chair

Mr. Royal Galipeau

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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•(0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC)): Welcome to the 41st meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

As a preamble, I would like to explain what we are doing.

When a Canadian Forces member leaves the army, the responsibility for them is transferred from the Department of National Defence to other stakeholders, such as Veterans Affairs Canada and the Service Income Security Insurance Plan. The large number of existing programs can make the transition process seem complex to military personnel, veterans and the general public, and lead to misunderstandings.

By studying the suite of services provided, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs wishes to clearly identify the key steps of the process and the programs available to military personnel, veterans and their families at each step, as well as the respective responsibilities of the parties involved. We hope this study will improve the understanding of the transition to civilian life.

[English]

This morning we have very distinguished guests. First I need to declare a potential conflict of interest. We have the Royal Canadian Legion. I've been a member of the Legion for more than 10 years. I've been a member of the friendliest Legion in the region, Branch 632.

By the way, volunteers are going to serve breakfast there in Orleans next Saturday. I think it's the last breakfast of the season. You're all invited.

We also have

[Translation]

the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research.

[English]

We're also expecting the Caregivers' Brigade.

This morning's meeting will be shorter than had been planned. At the request of the opposition, we will suspend at 9:45. There will be statements in the House by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the leader of the third party. But for the purposes of our study, I would ask members to allow our witnesses to all make their opening statements, so that they are on the record.

Whatever time is left, I am going to try to sort out in a fair manner the distribution of time among the three parties that are here for oral questions. If you find that you have questions you did not have an opportunity to put orally, send written questions to the clerk. He will forward them to the witnesses and we will have an exchange of written questions and replies that will also be part of the official record.

I hope that's all understood.

I'd like to first welcome Steven Clark, my servant.

•(0850)

Mr. Steven Clark (Acting Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion): Thank you very much.

Good morning, everyone. It is a great pleasure to appear here in front of your committee this morning. I am pleased to be able to speak to you on behalf of our Dominion president Tom Eagles and the 300,000 members of the Royal Canadian Legion and their families.

I'm Steven Clark, acting Dominion secretary. With me is Carolyn Gasser, service officer in the Dominion Command service bureau and someone who has gone through the transition process herself. We've been asked to discuss the programs, services, and support that the Royal Canadian Legion offers our veterans and their families in their transition to civilian life.

The positive transition to life after release is essential for Canadian Armed Forces members, whether they be regular or reserve force, the RCMP, or of course their families, because they constitute an important aspect as well.

The experience of life after release is different and unique for each veteran. Some voluntarily leave after a short period of service. Some are single, some have young families, and some are in need of employment. Others retire after 30 or 35 years of service, with grown families and with very good financial security. Some members who retire are injured as a result of their military service and they must make this transition under difficult circumstances. It is therefore important that the Department of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada, and the RCMP put in place complementary policies, practices, and programs supported by a sustainable research program, with the goal of enabling the healthy transition of all veterans and their families through this change in their life course.

The Royal Canadian Legion is the only veteran service organization that assists veterans and their families with representation to Veterans Affairs Canada and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. The Legion's advocacy program is core to our mission. We have been assisting veterans since 1926 through our legislative mandate in both the Pension Act and the new veterans charter. Our 23 professional command service officers are located across the country and provide free assistance to veterans and their families to obtain benefits and services from Veterans Affairs Canada. Please note that veterans do not have to be Legion members to request our services.

Our national service bureau network provides representation, starting with first applications to Veterans Affairs Canada, through all three levels of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board—the VRAB. Through the legislation, the Legion has access to service health records and departmental files in order to provide comprehensive yet independent representation at no cost. Last year, our service officers prepared and represented disability claims on behalf of more than 3,000 veterans to VAC and the VRAB. There is no other veterans group with this kind of direct contact, interaction, provision of support, and feedback from veterans, their families, and caregivers.

Ms. Carolyn Gasser (Service Officer, Dominion Command Service Bureau, Royal Canadian Legion): Our branch service officers are located in 1,400 Legion branches across Canada. In this challenging environment our branch service officers' functions become more important. Our volunteers are the boots on the ground and the eyes and ears in our community. It is important to us that every branch have an active and trained service officer to respond to the challenges facing our veteran community.

Branch service officers assist veterans by identifying those with unmet health needs and their possible benefits from VAC, and by making appropriate referrals to the command at the provincial level. Today the policies, programs, and services available to our veterans and their families are complex. Our command service officers are professional and receive regular training.

When it comes to serving veterans and their families, the Legion continues to be the only veterans organization in Canada advocating for and providing assistance to all our veterans. First and foremost we offer camaraderie in our branches. To ensure that this continues after service, the Legion offers a one-year free membership as part of the release process from the military. Presently 840 members have taken advantage of this initiative. Membership offers veterans and their families the opportunity to volunteer to help other veterans as part of the community building that is an important value of military culture.

The impact that military service has on our sailors, soldiers, airmen and women often makes the transition back to civilian life challenging. Today the Legion is seeing a change in the needs of some of our younger veterans. This is the age group from the early twenties onward. Many have invisible wounds and challenges with their transition back to civilian life. Our experience from the veterans transition program provides evidence that some veterans and their families feel isolated and need a welcome home in a real way. The veterans transition program, the only program of its kind in Canada, assists former members of the Canadian Forces in their transition to

civilian life and was developed to address the invisible wounds of our soldiers so they can function and have healthy relationships with their families, friends, at work, and with themselves.

It was established in 1999 with funding from the Legion B.C./Yukon Command. It is a group-based program facilitated by the University of British Columbia's faculty of medicine. It is free of charge to former members of both the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces. This program is expanding nationally and is planning to offer sessions uniquely developed for women. VAC supports the program and we recommend that DND and the Canadian Armed Forces support the expansion of the veterans transition program nationally to ensure that serving Canadian Armed Forces members affected by PTSD have access to this program.

The Legion in British Columbia has also partnered with the British Columbia Institute of Technology to deliver the Legion military skills conversion program to help accelerate and advance the civilian careers of former and current reserve and regular forces members. This program offers fast-track education with accreditation at BCIT through credits for military experience and assistance with developing their own businesses and finding jobs, post-release.

While the Legion continues to deliver many programs to veterans and families to ensure quality of life after release, and to ease the transition from service, more research is required to determine the effects of service unique to the Canadian military demographic and unique to Canadian operations. The Legion is currently engaged and supportive of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to ensure that this capability is implemented.

With this goal CIMVHR, as we like to call it, and the Royal Canadian Legion have made a commitment to offer a Canadian scholarship that will ensure a lasting legacy for veteran research in Canada by training a future generation of researchers. Beginning in 2013 Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion made a three-year commitment to provide an annual \$30,000 full-time master's scholarship to students who demonstrate excellence in their proposed research and exhibit significant potential for a high-impact research career in a relevant area. The research topics are related to an area of priority identified by the Legion and one of CIMVHR's priority research areas, and includes transition from military to civilian life.

• (0855)

Mr. Steven Clark: Families are the strength behind the uniform and must be engaged in the transition process from the very start, especially when it's a psychological injury. Families can request assistance from the military family resource centres, and there is a family liaison officer, who is a social worker, located in the integrated personnel support centres who can provide assistance to the family.

The first step in helping members leave the military is the transition interview. All releasing Canadian Armed Forces members, regular and reserve force, are entitled to a transition interview. For ill and injured members, we strongly recommend that it be mandatory for family members to be in attendance. We recommend that transition interviews be conducted early in the release process to help members and their families identify any needs they may have well ahead of time.

Our benevolent assistance program provides financial grants to meet the essential needs of veterans and their families who have limited financial means. The program is available at all levels of the Legion and is accessible to veterans, including still-serving members, and their families. We also assist allied veterans living in North America with obtaining benevolent assistance from a variety of resources. Our network of service officers at all levels of the Legion from coast to coast coordinate grants with other agencies, including the Canadian Forces military families fund, to ensure that the veterans' needs are met.

The Legion continues to be concerned with the lack of a formal capability or program that proactively reaches out to reserve units and their members to ensure these veterans are being looked after regarding access to disability benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada. With this in mind, the Legion sent a letter to every reserve unit in Canada offering a briefing on our service bureau network and the assistance available from the Royal Canadian Legion. To date, we have briefed more than 500 reservists on our services, but more important, these reserve units have been informed of our services.

The Legion also maintains an extensive outreach program to inform all veterans and their families about health promotion, independent living, community resources, and healthy lifestyles. We present at second career assistance network seminars on all bases and wings to inform members of our services. The Legion also has a presence at most of the Canadian Forces integrated personnel support centres on each base to assist veterans and their families as part of the transition process.

• (0900)

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: The Legion has been engaged in assisting homeless veterans for many years through our national leave the streets—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt.

In the comments I made before, I don't think I told you that there's a 10-minute limit. You're now at 11 minutes.

How much longer do you need?

Mr. Steven Clark: We will conclude in 45 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Gasser.

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: I will defer to Mr. Clark to finish the presentation.

Mr. Steven Clark: In summary, we do have a homeless veterans program that the Legion has been very active in promoting across the country.

All of what we have talked about is simply a brief snapshot of some of the programs that the Legion continues to support in the transition to life after a military career. We've been delivering these programs since 1926. We're very proud of our work and our accomplishments over almost 90 years of assisting veterans, young and old, and their families, and it is our firm belief that we will continue for the next 90.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clark. On behalf of the committee, I thank you very much.

I want to reassure you that we have a printed copy of your presentation. We're going to keep it safely and include it completely as part of our study. Thank you very much.

I had failed to introduce Carolyn Gasser, who is a service officer at the Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion.

Our next witness is Stéphanie Bélanger, who is the associate director of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bélanger, the floor is yours. You have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger (Associate Director, Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research): Good morning. Thank you for inviting the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I am a professor at the Royal Military College of Canada. Also, for 10 years I have been a reservist in the Royal Canadian Navy. It's an honour for me to be here.

I will talk about what we have to offer.

Thank you to the Legion for introducing a few of our programs.

We are a research institute. We are 37 universities across Canada working together at arm's length from government, but in service of the government, to provide the government with evidence-based research so they have better informed policies and programs, and not only government but organizations like the Legion or philanthropic organizations that want to invest in some of the programs. We are there to assess these programs and make sure the investments are worthwhile.

On the requirement and why we exist, we were founded in 2010. We were one of the only NATO countries or larger allied countries not to have such an institute for military and veteran health research. Given that we do have more than 700,000 veterans and almost 100,000 serving members, if you include with that all their families, it involves a few million Canadians. The need was there.

The research community was already doing research specific to that population. It is something extremely important for the research community across Canada to make understood to the tri-council agencies, as well as the Canadian population, the specific needs of serving members and veterans when it comes to health needs. These needs are specific due to the service they have, which is different from the service of other countries, and also are very linked to the Canadian warrior culture, if you wish, or non-warrior culture, depending on which point of view you have. At the same time, the research being done for military members and veterans is research that can be used for so many other citizens because it is transferable.

The public interest in supporting research also has been very high. We have had a lot of support, and we are still hoping to have more support from philanthropic agencies so that we can continue the research.

We are 37 Canadian universities linked together. This is very rare. Typically, researchers are in isolated silos. We are working together. We build research teams. It's our mandate. Our hub is in Kingston, which has the biggest community of veterans in Canada. Every time there is a research opportunity or a contract coming up, we link together different researchers from different universities who may or may not know each other yet. They work together, bring their expertise together, bring the research and the knowledge further, and provide better results.

We are also a conduit between Veterans Affairs, DND, and the researchers. At our annual forum, which always happens in November and is always hosted by one of our university members, we have between 400 and 600 researchers and stakeholders. They are all together and they exchange knowledge and build partnerships so that the programs and the policies for serving members and veterans can be better informed.

Our research portfolio is as follows: mental health and treatment; physical health and rehabilitation; social health and well-being; transition, which is the topic of this morning's research committee; novel technologies; occupational health; gender differences; and the ethics of health care and the healing of moral injury. All these topics have been discussed with the government and they are topics that are a need for government.

Both Veterans Affairs and DND have strong research teams. We are there to provide arm's-length research and also to complement their own capacity for research. We have an education program. We also offer webinars. Some of them are at the graduate level, and some of them are public lectures so we can give access to our knowledge to the larger public. When it comes to hot topics such as mental health, it becomes extremely important for the public to have access to these lectures.

● (0905)

We have a lot of knowledge translation mechanisms, one of which is our journal, the first of its kind. It is published through the University of Toronto Press and of course distributed across Canada. It has a very strong college of peer reviewers and a very strong board of directors. The *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* is the first of its kind and is open access. There's no fee to access it. You can have it through any search engine on the Internet or in any university. We also have a few collections. Some of them are available by a click. Some of them can be accessible by purchasing through McGill-Queen's University Press or in any university library.

We have offered to the government an unprecedented link with the academic community, a venue, a method to highlight the research that the government does and the research that the researchers do and to bring them together. There's a recognition of the implication of the work of the government stakeholder to the first responders, the humanitarians, and also to all Canadians, not only military and veterans, and a very rapid turnaround of research needs. We have a contract with the government through Public Works. The contract is with DND and Veterans Affairs, and as soon as they have a need, an ask—they want to know the cost of this, should they invest in that, is that program good, can you do a lit review on this, has this been done before—they come to us and we go through a peer review committee to make sure we create the best research team to assess the programs and do the research.

The most recent research that has been done on transition is all available online. Some of it has been done by the government, some of it by researchers. For instance, a research team has been built between the University of Manitoba and VAC, Veterans Affairs Canada, on the association between physical health and anxiety in veterans. Research has been done on the link between Veterans Affairs and DND, and these links are extremely important to us in terms of post-military adjustment to civilian life. Some research has been done on the link between post-traumatic stress disorder and the economic status of the veterans.

A big study, a life-after-service study, is being done by VAC and all the studies they are doing are available through our knowledge centres and tools and websites. At the University of Victoria work has been done on the Veterans Transition Network, where the Legion is involved. Our research team is trying to assess how efficient this program is for veterans and how much it's worth to invest in it. There are lots of evaluations of programs. This is one of them. The progressive goal attainment program is another one. Creating a future of strength and hope for soldiers is another program. All these programs are being assessed through the researchers who are linked to our institute.

A lot of research is being done on reservists. We're trying to see what the differences are between the different classes of reservists, the full-time, the part-time, and the reservists with the regular force, the class C, and also to see when a military member is released from the regular force or the reserve, if there is an economic implication. Is their status different from the civilian community's? Are their health needs different from the civilian community's? Research is being done right now where we are looking for identifiers with Statistics Canada and the Ministry of Health of Ontario, where we can see an identifier of veterans and what type of services they ask for when they go to the hospital. This will allow us to see exactly what type of population it is and whether they have different health needs from the rest of the population.

We have both research that is funded by the tri-council agencies or by different grants that the researchers come to us with. We also give research grants through donations like the Legion and Wounded Warriors and True Patriot Love, TPL, through the contract we have with the government.

• (0910)

Right now, there is research on transition that is being requested, so there was a tasking authorization that came to us, and we just sent out a call for participation to our researchers asking who would be able to find the determinants of successful transition outcomes for medically releasing Canadian Armed Forces members.

What we offer is a national capacity for research, to build a collaborative research team and to provide evidence-based programs and policies for the government.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bélanger.

[*English*]

Our next witness is Ms. Kimberly Davis, who is director of administration for the Caregivers' Brigade. We all welcome you here, and I welcome you especially.

I'm going to give you a one-minute signal when you've talked for nine minutes.

Ms. Kimberly Davis (Director of Administration, Caregivers' Brigade): I won't. You're lucky if you can get five minutes out of me. I talk really fast.

The Chair: All right, go ahead. We look forward to your wisdom.

Ms. Kimberly Davis: My background is that I am a veteran's spouse. I've worked with Peter Stoffer in the past in helping my husband decipher and manoeuvre through the Veterans Affairs system.

Our group, the Caregivers' Brigade, is a group of spouses. We have serving members' spouses, we have veterans' spouses, and we have the old Pension Act spouses. We came together because we saw that there was a need to help other spouses and family members know what's available out there.

My husband and I have been through every part of VAC. Mind you, he released in 2001, and we only started the VAC journey in 2007. As soon as the new veterans charter, or as soon as the veterans

charter came out—I know we're trying to get rid of the “new” part—that's when we sort of hit Veterans Affairs.

In terms of the Caregivers' Brigade, the spouses don't know what's available to them. The only way they know what's available to them is if their member comes home and tells them. If you know anything about military, they don't like sharing anything with their spouses. They are sort of left out in the dark in terms of knowing what's available to them.

Our group created a directory of resources. Our website is a directory of resources. We have over 70 links to various resources we have researched that are available to family members, to veterans, and to serving members. Our mission is to provide that directory of resources and help members manoeuvre through the system and know what's available to them. Family members don't know that they can have treatment. There are still members out there who don't know that they can have treatment. We inform them that they can have that treatment and how to get that treatment.

There's a challenge between what we think a case manager is in VAC and what a case manager is in DND. When there's a release, the case manager in DND hands it over to a case manager in VAC. When they're transitioning, what they do in DND is different from what we do in VAC. These members come out thinking that they have the same support system they had in DND, when in some cases it's not the same. It varies from one end of the country to the other. There doesn't seem to be a lot of consistency. This directory of resources allows them to know about the Legion, about CIMVHR, to know about VETS Canada. It lets them know about all the organizations that are out there, what mental health organizations there are. Some of them don't even know about Ste. Anne's and the mental health treatment there.

So in this we have all these links to these resources. We have connections to many of these resources in that if they're having difficulty deciphering the system, one of us will pick up the phone, make contact with them, and say, “You need to speak to this person. Can I give them your number?” They'll get in direct contact with them.

In essence, that's what we do. We're the connection. We sit on the stakeholders meetings to help learn more about what's available out there as well and to let them know that we're there. I created the website and I maintain the website. I do a lot of the administrative end. Because we've been through every part of the VAC system, we know who to speak to, how to get things done, what applications need to be filled out, and what they're entitled to.

The Caregivers' Brigade is there to assist these families. That way, not only do the spouses not go by the wayside.... In a lot of cases right now, the divorce rate is pretty high. A lot of spouses can't handle it because they don't know what's available to them. We're there to help alleviate some of that stress for them in letting them know what's available. It's also for the children. The children are a huge key in this whole process. When you have an ill or injured member who's coming out of the CF and they're struggling to find themselves, the children seem to get lost. As a spouse, you're split between taking care of your ill or injured member and your family. Sometimes it's the family that suffers, because all our dedication is to our ill and injured in helping them either reintegrate into society or finding the appropriate treatments that are available out there. We do a lot of research. We find out what papers have been written out there, what articles have been written out there.

To give you an example, my daughter is now seeing a psychologist who's helping her deal with what she's been raised with.

● (0915)

I've been with my husband 24 years. I was with him before he went overseas and I've been with him since. My children have been through this gauntlet. My daughter is now 18, so for 18 years of her life she has been living with this, and she doesn't know what a normal relationship is. So in noticing that and picking up on those cues, I sought help for her, but it wasn't easy.

That's why we're here, to help make the assistance, make these pillars, a lot easier for families to get into. If my husband doesn't pick up the phone and say, yes, my daughter needs help, my daughter doesn't get help. It has to go through the member, and that's one of our challenges. Everything has to go through the member, so when we're looking at this, we need to make the doors a little bit more open to the family themselves, not just the members. The members have a lot of supports, a lot of pillars, a lot of areas they can turn to, but the families don't.

I know they talk about how families can be very helpful, that they're there through every step of the way, but unless they're actually told what they can do and what they can't do, they don't know. A lot of the families will say, I've had enough and they walk away. That's happening more and more lately, and it's unfortunate. Then you end up with those who are needing the services of the Legion, or VETS Canada, because they've become homeless. They don't have a home anymore, and it's unfortunate because the family suffers; the kids suffer. That's a big issue with our organization, not only taking care of ourselves. A lot of us are very strong men and women as spouses, but there are some who really just don't know where to turn. That's where our directory of resources comes in to let them know what's actually available out there.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Davis. I thank you for your comments, particularly the one where you underlined the need to better integrate families into the management of these issues. You might be interested to know that this committee, last spring, made a recommendation going along those lines.

In order to allow as many members as possible to participate at this meeting, I am going to do rounds of questions of four minutes. I know this is a constraint that you're not used to, so you might want to

shorten the preambles and go directly to the question so we have more direct questions and answers.

[Translation]

The first committee member who will have the floor to ask questions is Mr. Chicoine.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would really like to thank the witnesses for participating in this study.

Ms. Bélanger, could you tell us about any research done recently or in the last five years that has directly influenced policies at Veterans Affairs Canada or at the Department of National Defence in terms of their transition services? How did the research findings help improve the transition services the two departments provide?

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: We are currently carrying out a study through our contract with the government on services for veterans. We are doing a study on the relationship between the costs and implications of those services. Are they having a positive impact on military members or not? That's the kind of research we are doing, and it's producing results for the government.

We also do research on the transition. For example, we are trying to assess veterans' exact needs during the transition. We are also trying to determine how their income varies. We are realizing that a former member of the regular force—the situation is different for reservists—will have a lower income for a few years.

How can we ensure those veterans will be followed closely to help them better position themselves in the labour market? We have also noted that, when veterans are followed by Veterans Affairs Canada or other groups, after five or six years, they manage to earn as much as or more than they used to.

That research on the economic status and specific physical or mental health needs helps the government better identify and target veterans.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you.

Have the departments in question ever not taken your research findings into account?

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: Researchers do carry out independent studies. The government decides whether to refer to it and follow up on it. Under our contract, we conduct government-commissioned studies. The deadlines to submit our findings are extremely tight, so we have to accelerate the research.

As you know, our organization would never defend a position or a program. Producing findings is always a challenge for us. A week of silence precedes the release of the findings during which everyone is preparing to receive the findings and use them. The process is extremely efficient, as the need is critical and pressing. We are barely able to meet the demand. We have at least a thousand researchers available to carry out studies.

● (0925)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: What research topics are you currently working on?

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: There are a number of topics. Among the research subject areas of more interest to this committee, we have the studies on service dogs, on transition and on ways to facilitate the process. Laboratory research is also being carried out on mental or physical health issues.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bélanger.

Mr. Lemieux, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

First of all I'd like to thank the Legion for having put together this particular issue. I think it was sent to all your members. I've read through it. This is excellent. It gives a very good synopsis of the old pension system, the new veterans charter, and the strengths and weaknesses of each. I think it also provides an excellent description of what is available to veterans under the new veterans charter and gives valuable guidance on how to fill out forms; in other words, with what level of detail. It's not enough just to say, "my hearing is failing and I need a benefit". It's more a question of explaining the circumstances, linking the benefit claim to service. You have given some really good examples in this issue.

I've been out visiting with veterans and Legion members. Just so you know, I promote this because I think it has done such a great job of summarizing all of that.

Let me ask a question. Of the 300,000 members you have, what percentage would be veterans and what percentage non-veterans?

Mr. Steven Clark: We have approximately one-third, about 100,000 individuals, who have personal military experience. We have other members, of course, who are family members, but those with direct military experience would be one-third.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's good. This publication went to every member, so it would have reached 100,000 veterans, 300,000 people.

Mr. Steven Clark: That's correct.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I also noticed that in your remarks you mention, for example, that last year you represented disability claims on behalf of more than 3,000 veterans to VAC and to VRAB. I'd be interested in knowing whether you track older veterans as distinct from newer veterans. I have heard anecdotally that newer veterans tend to not plug into the Legion and the service officers, that they tend to go it themselves. But that's just anecdotal. I'd rather have something a little more factual.

Do you track that kind of information?

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: We do with our first application process to Veterans Affairs Canada. We don't necessarily with the VRAB appeals.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay.

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: From my personal experience I can say that more and more, younger veterans are coming forward to us, and also still-serving members.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes.

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: RCMP are starting to come forward quite a bit more too.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Do you have any idea what the percentage would be? Is it 50:50, is it 60:40, 75:25?

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: I don't have the numbers with me. We have statistics back in the office, however.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It would be interesting to know. For example, when I give a presentation at a Legion, I would say the majority of veterans in attendance are older veterans—World War II, Korean War, Cold War types of veteran. It would be interesting to know. Perhaps we can follow up on that, then.

Let me ask a question on research to Stéphanie.

Your comment about veterans finding jobs was very interesting. You said that within five to six years, veterans generally find a job that equates to the salary they earned in the military or exceeds it. I wanted to ask just a few questions.

Are you talking about veterans with injuries who are being served by Veterans Affairs or by SISIP, or are you talking about all veterans?

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: This research is about all veterans. I could send you the link to that research, if you want to read the details. I didn't do it myself; I'm just giving you the results I read.

The results show that there is a small percentage of veterans who will not come back to an equivalent income. These people are the ones who have not come to VAC; they have not accessed the services. That can be for various reasons. They just don't want anything to do with it. They might think they shouldn't be clients of it, or there might be some mental health issues. In these cases, it is difficult for them to come back.

● (0930)

The Chair: Mr. Valeriotte, it's your turn.

By the way, for some of the questions and even some of the replies that left something dangling in your mind that you didn't think you had a chance to put in, send it in to the clerk, and we'll deal with it.

Mr. Valeriotte, you have four minutes.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you all for appearing before us.

Mr. Clark, I'm curious. I heard you say there were 23 service officers. How many are in Canada?

Mr. Steven Clark: The command service officers are in Canada.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte: So there are 23 across Canada who help our veterans fill out application forms, essentially.

Mr. Steven Clark: That's correct. That's on the provincial level. We have service officers in each of our 1,400 branches, but the 23 professional ones would be our command officers.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Are the professional ones trained differently from the ones in the various Legions across Canada?

Mr. Steven Clark: They get more training.

Carolyn...?

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: We get more training and we also have higher accessibility, I guess, to Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: How well trained are those at the local Legions who aren't among the 23?

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: They're referral agents. They understand what programs are out there, but they refer them to the provincial command service officers.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Who are the 23. All right.

We have thousands and thousands of veterans—thousands who have come from Afghanistan alone—who need help. The government is always referring to the many service officers who are out there and who are helping them fill out applications. We know that there is difficulty in getting these applications filled out. The Auditor General has said it is taking too long to receive and process them.

Is it fair to say that you need more service officers and more training for those service officers, if we're going to accommodate our veterans?

Mr. Steven Clark: I wouldn't say that we need more training. What we need to have is more communication, so that we can get the information about the services available to these veterans out to the members. That's something that our 1,400 service officers do locally; they reach out and search out individuals.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Have you taken a poll or done a study of how many of your first applications are successful as opposed to those declined and for which you then you have to appeal?

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: No, we haven't, but I believe they are fairly similar to those for Veterans Affairs Canada and the VRAB.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Okay. Now I want to ask Kimberly a question.

I want to thank you for your evidence. I was moved by it. I think of Jenny Migneault, who came to my office and talked to me about her circumstances.

What I'm feeling is that there are gaps between the services you guys offer, the services the Legion offers.... There are so many people out there trying to fill all these gaps, but nobody is aligning and harmonizing all the services that should be made available to our veterans.

Do you see a role through Veterans Affairs Canada to bring all of you together in some way under the same roof to see what organizations are out there and how you can better align the services you might offer, so that the Legion can go to you under certain circumstances or you can align yourself with the Legion under certain circumstances so that our veterans are better served?

Ms. Kimberly Davis: Well, having Veterans Affairs bring us all together is good because we all hit different areas. Our main focus is families, and a lot of the other organizations out there are focusing on the veteran or the serving member being released.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Is the family getting enough support?

Ms. Kimberly Davis: No.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Has Veterans Affairs Canada made an effort to offer that support to integrate families into the treatment process?

Ms. Kimberly Davis: They are trying. As an example, my husband was in the rehabilitation vocational program with Veterans Affairs. He is now totally and permanently impaired, so he no longer qualifies for vocational rehab because he no longer has the ability to be rehabilitated. I'm able to take advantage of that program and take his vocational rehab and go back to school.

One of the challenges, when they bring these applications in and with the timeframe you were talking about, is that if you send it to the average person or the average family out there, they look at this paperwork and it's like Greek to them. The challenge is that they have to not only decipher through—

● (0935)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Can you send the balance of your response in writing, as the chair suggested?

Ms. Kimberly Davis: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Lizon, you have four minutes.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming here this morning.

The first question I have is for Mr. Clark. In your presentation you mentioned that you would like to see, in certain circumstances, mandatory family participation or attendance. I understand the reason for it, but on the other hand anything that's made mandatory may create problems because sometimes the individual situation may prevent the family from attending the process.

Therefore, can you comment on that? I think there should be flexibility there. The idea is good but maybe it doesn't apply to all cases.

Mr. Steven Clark: Absolutely. I agree that the family does need to be involved whenever possible. But there will be those situations where it is not possible, for one reason or another, so there has to be that flexibility to accommodate an individual family situation. It can't be as strict and regimented as yes and no. We encourage it and we'd like to see it, but we realize there will be exceptions.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Also, you did mention that homelessness is a problem.

This committee did travel to a few places. One of them was the Good Shepherd Ministries in Toronto. There was a pilot project that the Legion was involved with. Can you perhaps tell the committee what the success rate is and where we are now?

Mr. Steven Clark: The success rate varies from province to province. Some have very well-established homeless veterans programs, while others are just getting under way. The Legion has committed a half a million dollars to assist with programs across the country and our provincial commands will match that, so that means there is potentially \$1 million to address the issue.

But with regard to its success, I don't have statistics—unless you have those, Carolyn. We will make sure we forward those to the clerk, so you have that detail.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Thank you.

The last question to you is this. If you had to name the biggest challenges you have in this work, helping veterans in their transition, what would they be?

Mr. Steven Clark: It is communication.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: But communication in what sense? We do hear it and the committee has heard before that there is a problem with communications. Therefore, if there are concrete measures that should be taken, what would they be? We've been talking about this as gaps in communications. What should be done to address the issue?

Mr. Steven Clark: One of the issues would be, in fact, that transition interview, so that information on resources available—either coordinated through Veterans Affairs or through the individual associations that provide that assistance—and those details could be passed on to the serving members and their families, if available. But we really need to focus on the transition interview to make sure that information is passed on.

In the SCAN seminars, as well, lots of excellent information is passed on, but again they are optional for a releasing member, not mandatory.

If we can get these individuals to participate in either these interviews or SCAN seminars earlier so that the knowledge starts to be imparted on an earlier basis, well ahead of time, that would certainly assist with their transition as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Clark.

Mr. Donnelly, you have three minutes. You'll have to be a fast talker.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following your lead, I should disclose that I am a member of the Coquitlam Legion 263, and also my mother-in-law served in the air force during the Second World War.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here this morning.

I have one question that I'd like to ask all three of our witnesses. Do you agree with the idea that there exists a moral, legal, fiduciary, and social obligation between the people and the Government of Canada to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the armed forces who have been injured, disabled, or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependents, which the Government of Canada is obligated to fulfill?

Perhaps the Legion members can start.

• (0940)

Ms. Carolyn Gasser: One of the recommendations we've put forward is that it should be instituted in the new veterans charter as it was in the Pension Act.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: There is a social covenant and this is what started the research institute. It is being studied as well in military ethics studies. There is lots of evidence of that social covenant existing in every country where the government will task people with a clause of unlimited liability, and because of this clause there is an obligation to serve back.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Ms. Kimberly Davis: I would have to agree.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you very much.

My second question is for the Caregivers' Brigade. In terms of delivering the appropriate level of care to loved ones, is there a discrepancy between the amount of benefits and services that veterans receive from Veterans Affairs and the actual cost of delivering care?

Ms. Kimberly Davis: I'm glad you asked, because I actually just went through that.

This comes not only from our own personal psychologist but also from a psychologist out in the Prairies. The cost to deliver the care and what the psychologists are receiving for treating veterans is anywhere from half to three-quarters of what they're paid in civilian life. They are all committed to helping veterans. Unfortunately the paycheque that goes along with helping veterans is a lot less, so you're not going to have those budding young psychologists or psychiatrists popping up saying, "Pick me. Pick me" because if they can open up a practice and get paid the standard going rate in their area versus what they'd be paid by Veterans Affairs, they're going to take the standard going rate in their area. Then we end up falling short in providing those services to the veterans and their families.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do I have time for a quick question?

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: With regard to the last question on lost opportunities, are those, in your opinion, taken into account in the calculation of how veterans are compensated or what they receive? For instance, if they're unable to work in different careers because of a disability, do you think that is taken into account or calculated in—

The Chair: You took the whole time up.

You can reply to that question in writing.

Ms. Kimberly Davis: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Hayes, you have two minutes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will take only two minutes. My Legion membership dues are outstanding, but we'll get caught up on that.

Madam Bélanger, in your opinion, what is your most critical research item or finding and subsequent recommendation that has not yet been implemented?

Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger: That is a valid question. Right now the most pressing issue is how to have access to the population of veterans at the moment of transition, and this is why there is so much research being done on transition. We're trying to figure out a way to ease the transition by following the member before they are released until they are released so that they will have access to all the programs before they need them, so they know the programs exist and they and their families are well educated.

This is where the work most needs to be done right now. I'm not saying the work is not being done, but this is where there is a gap, where we as committed researchers are trying to reduce that gap.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you especially to the members of the committee for having followed the whip so well.

● (0945)

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared this morning for sharing their experience and wisdom with us.

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