



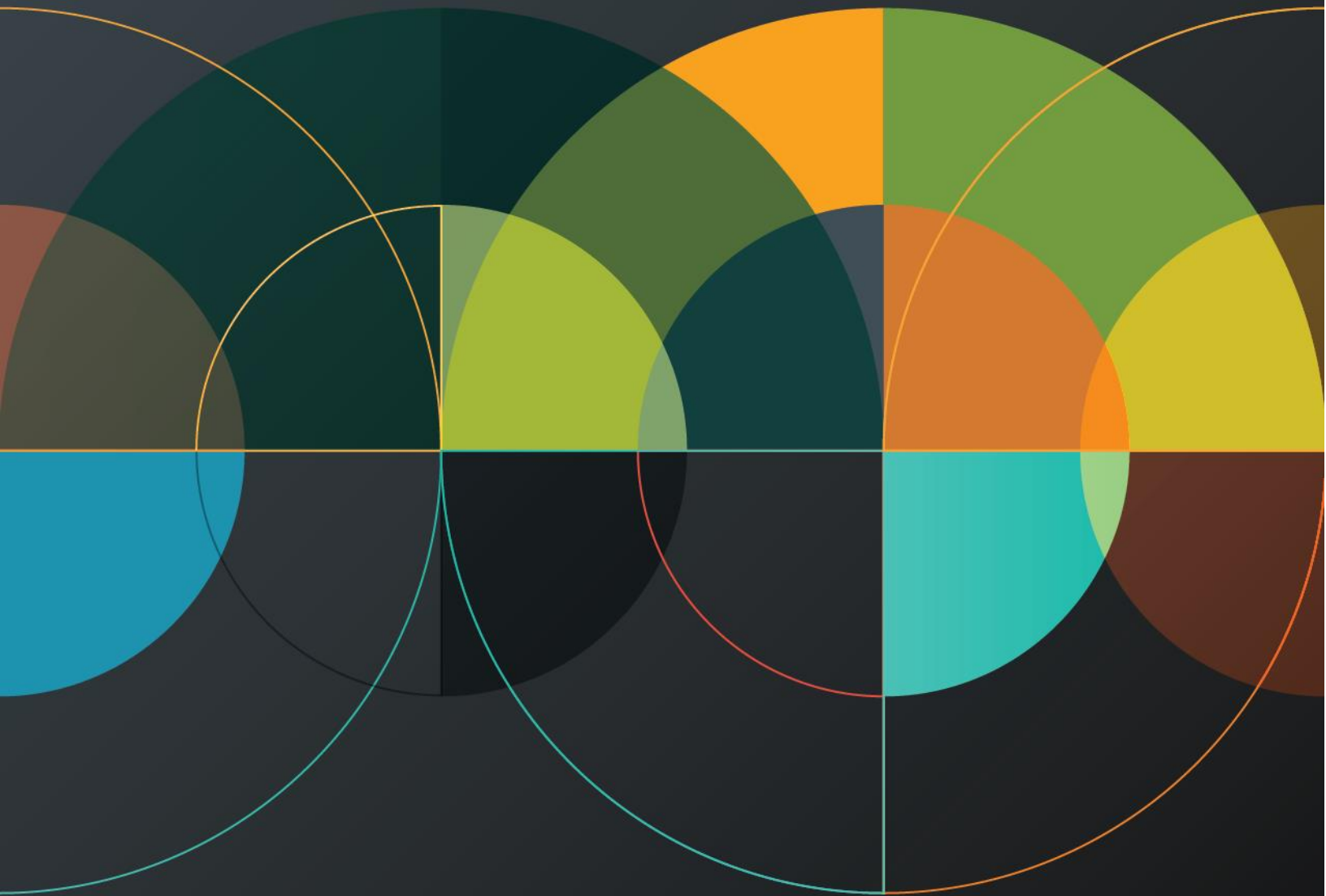
Government  
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# **Veterans Affairs Canada Implementation Plan for Canada's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security – 2023 to 2029**

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# Introduction and purpose

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In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS), which reaffirms the important role of women in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, post-conflict reconstruction and the prevention and resolution of conflicts. The resolution also stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, the UNSC has adopted a series of resolutions on the WPS agenda, with many member states committing to developing and implementing a National Action Plan (“action plan”) to address the differential impact of conflict on women and girls, and support their participation in peace and security efforts.<sup>2</sup> Canada launched its first action plan in 2010,<sup>3</sup> its second in 2017<sup>4</sup> and its third in 2023 for the period of 2023 to 2029.<sup>5</sup> The action plan was launched with the following implementing partners: Global Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Public Safety Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Department of Justice, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Indigenous Services Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

VAC recognizes that women are powerful agents of peace and security and that the inclusion of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people helps create and sustain peace and security for all. VAC’s first departmental implementation plan lays out a 6-year road map to implement Canada’s third National Action Plan on women, peace and security, outlining the focus areas that VAC will contribute to, as well as expected outcomes, alignment to other VAC departmental initiatives and key considerations.

The main focus of Canada’s action plan has evolved over time. Canada’s first National Action Plan on women, peace and security focused primarily on conflict areas abroad. In the second National Action Plan, Canada publicly acknowledged that—even though Canada is not a fragile or conflict-affected state—“women in Canada face a variety of challenges, including gender-based violence.” Women Veterans, in particular, have faced discrimination and violence based on gender while in service. In 2016 and 2017, 7 former members of the Canadian Armed Forces initiated class action lawsuits (“Heyder and Beattie class actions”) against the Government of Canada (“Canada”) alleging sexual harassment, sexual assault or discrimination based on sex, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation (“sexual misconduct”) in connection with their military service and/or employment with the DND and/or staff of the non-public funds of the Canadian Forces.<sup>6</sup> Canada’s second National Action Plan stated that “Indigenous women and girls also face intersecting discrimination and violence based on gender, race, socio-economic status and other identity factors, as well as underlying historic causes—in particular, the legacy of colonialism and the devastation caused by the residential school system.<sup>7</sup> Civil society has been calling on Canada to implement an action plan that focuses further attention on domestic issues, as “peace” and “security” should not be defined narrowly. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls exemplifies that those insecurities are also part of Canada’s domestic reality. In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls face disproportionately negative impacts with far-reaching consequences. The Government of Canada sees the

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<sup>1</sup> [Security Council resolution 1325 - UNSCR](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security | UN Peacemaker](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Canada’s Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security – 2010 to 2016](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Canada’s Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security – 2017 to 2022](#)

<sup>5</sup> Year 2023 is the bridging year between the second and their National Action Plan.

<sup>6</sup> [CAF-DND Sexual Misconduct Class Action Settlement](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Canada’s Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security - 2017-2022](#)

relevance and urgency of implementing the WPS agenda at home, hence the third National Action Plan is more domestically oriented.

VAC also sees this as an opportunity to continue to strengthen its relationships with departments and agencies like the DND/CAF and the RCMP by becoming a partner department in the WPS agenda and launching its first departmental implementation plan. The department is working jointly with the CAF and the DND through a joint steering committee to address seamless transition issues, including access to preventive measures and programs. VAC is responsible for supporting the care and well-being of Veterans and their families, caregivers—depending on program eligibility—and former and, in certain cases, serving, members of the RCMP. Becoming an implementation partner gave VAC the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the third National Action Plan.

It should be emphasized that VAC's implementation plan includes women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans. Paying attention to 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans is important for moving past policies that default to the needs of cisgender, heterosexual women. VAC acknowledges that 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans often face increased discrimination and are vulnerable to insecurity and violence because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Viewing population insecurity through a gender lens that includes 2SLGBTQI+ people offers VAC an opportunity to improve human security more broadly. Failing to account for those who fall outside of a heteronormative construction of who qualifies as a "woman" leaves more marginalized voices out and is, hence, counter to a gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) approach.



# Context

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Canadian women have played an important and inevitable role in the country's military efforts over the years. Their first military contributions date to the First World War, when more than 2,800 Canadian nurses, known as the Nursing Sisters, tended to the sick and wounded. However, for many years, women mainly worked in administrative and supportive roles due to the systemic barriers imposed upon them, and it was not until 1989 that all combat roles were finally opened to women. Today, women CAF members are serving alongside men in all elements of the Canadian Armed Forces.

In October 2021, the Office of the Veterans Ombud (OVO) published a scoping literature review on women Veterans of the CAF and the RCMP. The review found that despite Canadian women's selfless contributions, they have faced more challenges than men, both during and after service. In the CAF, overall, women are under-represented in senior leadership and combat roles. Serving CAF women also generally:

- earn less than serving CAF men, often because of their shorter lengths of service;
- are more likely to have repetitive strain injuries, joint pain and chronic illnesses; and
- are about twice as likely as their men counterparts to have an acute injury from military training; and,
- are medically released more often than men. Women CAF members are more likely than their men counterparts to have suicidal ideation and attempts.

CAF women and Veterans more often:

- have a difficult adjustment to civilian life than men;
- find losing their military identity more challenging than do men;
- experience activity limitations and require assistance with activities of daily living more often than men;
- report mental health problems more often than their men counterparts;
- have significantly lower levels of social support than men Veterans; and
- are approximately 2% more likely than men Veterans to experience episodic homelessness.

Research also finds that gender-blind or gender-neutral programs and services for Veterans best serve men because they are in the majority; as such, there is a need for VAC to offer programs and services tailored to the special and unique needs of women Veterans.<sup>8</sup>

DND/CAF was a key implementation partner in Canada's first National Action Plan (2010 to 2016). Based on CAF Employment Equity Report for fiscal year 2015-2016, the percentage of women in the Canadian military was 14.9%, so in the second DND/CAF departmental implementation plan, the CAF stated that it would strive to increase the number of women as well as improve

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<sup>8</sup> [Women Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police: A scoping review | Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health \(utpjournals.press\)](#)

retention of women in the forces; specifically, the CAF aimed to increase the percentage of women in the Canadian military by 1% per year to achieve the desired goal of 25% by 2026.<sup>9</sup> As of April 2022, the percentage of the Canadian military who were women was 16.3%.<sup>10</sup> DND/CAF also committed to increase the number of uniformed women deployed on international operations and in decision-making positions. The second RCMP implementation plan set a goal to meet or exceed the target that 20% of deployments to peace operations/missions under the International Police Peacekeeping and Peace Operations (IPP) Program are composed of women, including in senior and/or influential positions.<sup>11</sup> Based on these targets, VAC is expecting to see an ongoing increase in the number of women CAF and RCMP Veterans—particularly in the number of women who have been deployed abroad—making it critical to ensure VAC has inclusive policies, programs and services that equitably meet the specific needs of these populations.

As of February 28, 2023, of all Veterans (147,748) served by VAC, a total of 19,150 were female Veterans, representing about 12.9%.<sup>12</sup>

On December 16, 2021, a mandate letter called for the Minister of Veterans Affairs to take concrete actions to ensure that the services and benefits necessary for the physical, mental and economic well-being of Veterans, their families and caregivers are easily accessible, responsive and available in a timely manner.<sup>13</sup> In response, VAC increased its research into the differing needs of women Veterans from a physical and mental health perspective, as well as the provision of appropriate treatments and supports, which included an increased focus on military sexual trauma (MST) and the impacts of the LGBT Purge.<sup>14</sup> Findings from the research served as baselines from which VAC will continue to translate the ambitious goals set out in Canada’s third National Action Plan and turn them into concrete activities to better meet the specific and unique needs of women Veterans. VAC is determined to strengthen and improve its commemorative activities by highlighting more prominently the role and contributions of women Veterans and ensuring different women Veteran identities are considered, including Indigenous, Black and racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ identities.

The 2021 Census was a key milestone as it provided insight into the socio-demographic, economic, family and household characteristics of Veterans. The 2021 Census was the first census since 1971 to ask Canadians about their military service. It was also the first census to ever specifically count women Veterans and Indigenous Veterans. Moving forward, VAC will be able to explore more sophisticated ways that data from the census can support VAC programs and services beyond providing simple demographic estimates of the Veteran population. VAC will continue to work with Statistics Canada to use the 2021 Census findings to identify subpopulations of Veterans who have greater needs.

In addition, throughout 2021 and 2022, VAC worked with Statistics Canada to stratify the design of the new Canadian Veteran Health Survey, whose results will provide insight into the health and well-being of Canadian Veterans after they transition to civilian life. “Females” are one of the 4 stratified groups. Data collected from this survey will enable VAC to conduct detailed analyses of women Veterans regarding their physical and mental health, as well as their use of health care services and supports.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces implementation of Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Statistics of women in the Canadian Armed Forces](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Royal Canadian Mounted Police implementation of Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#)

<sup>12</sup> The data is pulled from the VAC internal Facts and Figures dashboard, and client numbers are reported according to biological sex rather than gender. Throughout this implementation plan, the term “female veterans” will be used occasionally, as some of the research conducted has used this construct. VAC recognizes that not all individuals identify with a binary concept of sex or gender and that dialogue on gender identity continues to be a priority in Canada and around the world. The understanding of sex and gender and how and when to use these designations continues to grow and shift.

<sup>13</sup> [Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter \(pm.gc.ca\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> [LGBT Purge – LGBT Purge Class Action](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Our Veterans’ stories told in numbers - Statistics Canada \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

VAC provides benefits and services to War Service Veterans, CAF Veterans and members, RCMP members and former members, and survivors. VAC also recognizes that family members play a significant role in supporting the physical health, mental health and overall care and well-being of Veterans. Family members may be involved in mental health services when the Veteran's health professional indicates that doing so will have a positive impact on the Veteran's mental health. For participants in the rehabilitation program, family members may be involved in mental health services when the assessing or treating professional indicates that doing so will help meet the participant's rehabilitation goal. VAC will continue to provide free, short-term psychological support via a mental health professional to Veterans, former RCMP members, their family members and caregivers through the VAC Assistance Service (VAS). Given that most VAC clients are male Veterans and survivors/family members are primarily female, providing support to survivors/family members of Veterans helps to support the care and well-being of women in general.

## Focus areas

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Canada's first National Action Plan provided a framework for a cohesive whole-of-government approach supporting Canadian efforts to implement the UNSC resolutions on women, peace and security. It was organized into thematic areas that reflected the content of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, namely prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. The scope of Canada's second National Action Plan was much wider, also discussing the various challenges Canadian women have faced historically, as well as the challenges they are still experiencing today, especially the intersecting discrimination and violence faced by Indigenous women and girls. During the consultation stage of developing Canada's third National Action Plan, the Government of Canada learned that there is an ever-increasing need to develop the plan from an inclusive, intersectional and feminist approach. As such, the latest iteration of the action plan is structured around 6 focus areas:

- Focus area 1: Building and sustaining peace
- Focus area 2: Security, justice and accountability
- Focus area 3: Crisis response
- Focus area 4: Sexual and gender-based violence
- Focus area 5: Leadership and capabilities
- Focus area 6: Inclusion

Partners implementing Canada's third National Action Plan are not expected to contribute to each of the 6 focus areas; rather, they will concentrate on areas that are most relevant to their department's core responsibilities and mandates.

VAC's 3 Core Responsibilities are as follows:

- Benefits, Services and Support: Support the care and well-being of Veterans and their dependents or survivors through a range of benefits, services, research, partnerships and advocacy.
- Commemoration: Pay tribute to the sacrifices and achievements of those who served in Canada's military efforts.

- Veterans Ombudsperson: Provide an independent and impartial review of complaints and issues related to programs and services delivered by the Veterans Affairs Portfolio and uphold the Veterans Bill of Rights.

Several of the key commitments in the Prime Minister’s mandate letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs dated December 16, 2021, are:

- In collaboration with the Minister of National Defence, ensure support is available to Veterans affected by sexual misconduct in the military, including access to peer support services and services provided by the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre.
- Ensure the benefits system and services are responsive to and meet the needs of underrepresented Veterans, including women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, racialized and Indigenous Veterans. This will include the use of disaggregated research and data to provide tailored programs and services.
- With the support of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, ensure CAF members and Veterans have access to adequate mental health resources, services, and training programs tailored to their specific needs.
- Ensure that modern Veterans, as well as women, Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans from all conflicts are recognized and commemorated and that we recognize the valuable contributions of Canadian Armed Forces Veterans who have served our country in domestic operations such as wildfires, ice storms, and floods.

In alignment with the above-mentioned departmental Core Responsibilities and Mandate Letter commitments, VAC will contribute to the following 4 focus areas: 3) crisis response, 4) sexual and gender-based violence, 5) leadership and capabilities and 6) inclusion.

In line with Canada’s third National Action Plan’s feminist approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning, which focuses on impact, VAC will track the following department-level key performance indicator: “Narrative summary of VAC’s efforts toward achieving health equity through the inclusion and integration of women’s and gender-diverse Veterans’ perspectives/experiences during the reporting period.” This indicator will be reported annually through Canada’s third National Action Plan reporting process and contributes to Focus Area 6: Inclusion. The indicator was selected to reflect and transparently monitor efforts within VAC to engage with women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans It also monitors the capacity of the department to integrate these perspectives and experiences into policy and programming.



# Focus area 3: Crisis response

## Narrative

Initiatives and commitments under this focus area will enable VAC to improve its crisis response, meaning an international crisis, such as a war, famine, or natural disaster, by responding to the needs of women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans and RCMP members where GBA Plus policy is utilized to address Veterans in all their diversity. This can be done by prioritizing women Veterans who have deployed to peacekeeping operations, UN missions and domestic crises, and recognizing the physical, mental and social health impacts on their lives as a result of their service. VAC can develop tools to assist women Veterans in accessing care and connect them with communities where they can navigate the trauma among others who share those experiences.

The need for Canadian Veterans to access assistance services and emergency funds has been growing steadily, particularly over the past 2 years. The need for mental health care and support is also rising. Mental health problems are known to occur at higher rates among serving members than among the civilian population. The prevalence of mental health conditions is particularly high among the most recently released Veterans. Those who were released between 2015 and 2018 showed rates of depression at 32.9%, anxiety at 29.7% and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at 29.7%. For example, 54% of CAF Veterans with a disability benefit related to service in Afghanistan are in receipt of a VAC pension/award for PTSD. Mental health issues have an impact on Veterans, their income, quality of life, disability and risk of suicidality. The 2019 Veteran Suicide Mortality Study found that:

- Male Veterans overall had a 1.4 times higher risk of dying by suicide compared to the male Canadian general population, with the youngest group at the highest risk.
- Female Veterans overall had a 1.9 times higher risk of dying by suicide compared to the female Canadian general population, and this risk was relatively consistent across age groups.

Over the past 2 years, there has been a 22% increase in demand for individualized psychological support services provided through VAS, highlighting the core value and need for the program. This program guarantees timely access to mental health care professionals in the Veteran's home community, which is particularly important given there is a shortage of qualified mental health care providers across Canada. The program is widely successful, with 93% of cases being resolved with short-term counselling and without the requirement for additional referrals. Feedback from users of the service also demonstrates a positive outcome with 86% of users being satisfied with the services provided and 87% being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their counsellor's ability to understand their concerns.

Analysis shows that both gender and marital status are key indicators for Veterans Emergency Fund (VEF) recipients, with single males being the largest recipient category (55%) and single females making up the vast majority of female recipients (78%). Previous VAC research has also demonstrated that female Veterans experience the most significant drops in income post-release, highlighting the importance of this support to women Veterans.

## Intermediate outcome

Improved integration of inclusive and gender-responsive interventions to crises in Canada and abroad

## Immediate outcome

To improve the integration of inclusive and gender-responsive interventions to crises faced by women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans of the CAF and the RCMP



To achieve the above-mentioned immediate outcome, VAC will conduct or continue to conduct the following activities:

- Through the VAS, Veterans can access an online referral service that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Veterans, their families and caregivers are eligible to receive free, confidential access of up to 20 psychological support sessions provided through a national network of mental health care professionals. The program also provides free access to pastoral care services, bereavement services and online mental health resources. Individuals do not need to be in receipt of VAC benefits or services to access the program. In 2021-2022 fiscal year, 2,385 Veterans and their family members accessed the program, and by 2026-2027 fiscal year, it is forecasted that 5,935 individuals will require these services.
- Through the VEF, VAC will continue providing emergency financial assistance to support Veterans and their families who are facing an immediate financial crisis that threatens their health and well-being. VEF provides Veterans and their families, including spouses and survivors, a tax-free payment within 1-2 business days to address their short-term financial needs when they are experiencing an emergency. VEF is one of only a few VAC programs that can assist Veterans who do not have a service-related injury. VEF also provides VAC with an opportunity to work with spouses and survivors who might never have contacted the department before. A large objective of VEF is to refer applicants to other VAC programs and external resources to assist them over the longer term. Since program implementation on April 1, 2018, and until March 31, 2023, funding was provided to female Veterans on 715 separate occasions. As of March 31, 2023, 15% of VEF applicants were female, and this aligns with the percentage of females in the Veteran population as a whole. VAC will continue to make emergency funding available to Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless via the VEF.
- The Veteran Homelessness Program (Infrastructure Canada lead) is part of the National Housing Strategy, a suite of federal housing initiatives designed to improve access to affordable and safe housing for all Canadians. The program will provide \$72.9 million in funding for rent supplements and wraparound services, such as counselling and treatment for substance use, through its Services and Supports Stream. In addition, the Capacity Building Stream will provide \$6.2 million in funding to support research on Veteran homelessness and capacity building. In the 2019 National Shelter Study, 13.8% of shelter users reporting military service were women. The program will seek to ensure that the needs of specific populations are considered, including people with disabilities, women, people fleeing violence, Indigenous Peoples, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, and Black and racialized Canadians.
- Since April 1, 2022, CAF Veterans who apply for a disability benefit for certain mental health conditions—as well as those who had already applied and were awaiting a decision—are automatically qualified for Mental Health Benefits coverage. Under the new Mental Health Benefits, Veterans have up to 2 years of coverage for the treatment of conditions, such as anxiety and depressive disorders or trauma- and stressor-related disorders. To date, this benefit has helped approximately 700 women Veterans receive early access to mental health treatments.
- VAC Field Operations activates its emergency response protocols during crisis situations, like the pandemic, ice storms and localized flooding, to ensure the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable clients, often women and children, offering emergency interventions if/as needed.

# Focus area 4: Sexual and gender-based violence

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## Narrative

Sexual and gender-based violence, also referred to as gender-based violence, is one of the most pervasive, deadly and deeply rooted human rights violations of this time. It is a significant barrier to achieving peace, security and gender equality. The Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre (SMSRC) provides support services to currently serving and former members of the CAF and to DND public service employees who are affected by sexual misconduct.

Although it is recognized that both women and men are victims of sexual trauma, statistics do show that the majority of impacted individuals are women. Women CAF members are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual misconduct, sexual assault and discrimination than are men members.<sup>16</sup> VAC has been collaborating with academia to learn how to translate findings from research into concrete programs to support military sexual trauma (MST) survivors. For example, VAC collaborated with Mount Saint Vincent University and Queen's University for the research study *Women Veterans' Experience with Military to Civilian Transition* to examine the experiences of women CAF members before and during the transition to identify sex and gender considerations to better support women's military to civilian transition. VAC also collaborated with the University of Manitoba for the research study *Prevalence and Correlates of Military Sexual Trauma* to identify the occurrence of both military sexual trauma and non-military-related sexual trauma in male and female active-duty CAF members and Veterans. Also, VAC collaborated with McMaster University and It's Not Just 20,000 on the research study *Military Sexual Trauma and Critical Conversations* to assess the impact on both MST survivors and institutions when engaging in leadership-level conversations about sexual misconduct and military sexual trauma.

Going forward, VAC will continue to strengthen its collaboration and engagement with women Veterans and their networks, and provide corresponding support to women Veterans survivors of MST. VAC continues to engage with the DND and the SMSRC concerning Veterans impacted by sexual misconduct during their service, as well as to participate as a member of their External Advisory Committee on Sexual Misconduct.

## Intermediate outcome

**Enhanced gender-responsive prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts or perpetrated by actors working in peace, humanitarian, international development and security sectors in Canada or abroad**

## Immediate outcome

**To enhance gender-responsive prevention and response to women Veterans who experienced sexual or gender-based violence while they were serving in the CAF**

To achieve the above-mentioned immediate outcome, VAC will conduct, or will continue to conduct, the following activities:

- VAC has contributed to initiatives such as the SMSRC expansion, to ensure consideration is given to impacts on Veteran programming as service members and Veterans seek benefits, services and support for physical and/or mental health conditions related to sexual trauma during service. VAC has partnered with the SMSRC to develop a virtual and in-person peer support program for those impacted by MST. The initial launch sessions began June 13, 2023, and will be followed by a full program launch thereafter VAC aims to provide programs that meet the needs of people with lived

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<sup>16</sup> [Women Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police: A scoping review \(ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca\)](https://ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca)

experience. The department is listening to affected individuals to better understand the impact of military sexual trauma on their lives as well as their loved ones' lives. The safety and security of the initial launch participants is of utmost importance to both project teams and is part of the MST peer support program design.

- VAC will take an agile approach in reviewing policies for Veterans and CAF members who have applied for benefits involving any medical condition resulting from military sexual trauma. Based on what VAC learns, it will update programs, benefits and services to address their needs.
- VAC will continue to work with the Military Sexual Trauma Community of Practice to support women, Black, Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ CAF members and Veterans affected by sexual misconduct through a collective understanding of this challenge. It aims to influence policy change to make their lives better.
- In February 2023, VAC Field Operations hosted a panel discussion, open to all VAC staff, relating to support services for people affected by sexual misconduct. The event allowed staff to increase their awareness and understanding of the resources available to best support Veterans and their families when they have been impacted by sexual misconduct. Field Operations also introduced a new professional development resource specific to sexual trauma entitled "Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Trauma". This self-paced learning will assist VAC employees in furthering their knowledge and skill set around sexual trauma disclosures.



# Focus area 5: Leadership and capabilities

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## Narrative

VAC is committed to providing the best services possible to women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans by identifying and reviewing their unique needs and then implementing corresponding programs, services and benefits. VAC will continue to play a leadership role in this regard. VAC recognizes the importance of collaborating closely with other federal organizations to expand its capacities to meet the ever-increasing needs of these populations. VAC will continue to develop and disseminate the necessary tools, resources and expertise to serve women Veteran clients, ensuring different women Veteran identities are considered, including Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ identities. VAC is committed to improving the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data and would apply the proper data in its decision-making processes.

In May 2019, VAC held the first [Women Veterans Forum](#),<sup>17</sup> which brought together Veterans, researchers, experts and organizational leaders to discuss specific challenges women face in their life after service. In 2020, VAC hosted the second forum (4 virtual events)<sup>18</sup> focusing on women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. The third Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum (2 events) was held in February 2023. Over the course of the 2 events, approximately 280 attendees and viewers tuned in. Through the Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum, VAC proposed to gain a broader understanding of diverse Veteran identities and their lived experiences, as well as hear about gaps and needs of under-represented Veterans, particularly women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. The 2023 forum proposed a way to continue meaningful engagement between VAC, women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans and the stakeholder community to discuss progress and navigate a way forward for achieving equity. VAC is committed to action by integrating information and learnings from the Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veteran Forum into VAC policy, programs and commemorations. VAC will use the feedback gathered as a baseline for future forum planning.

VAC is committed to consulting with Veterans and their families, the RCMP and their families and the broader stakeholder community to create space for advice and suggestions. VAC has also been engaging with stakeholders to discuss current and emerging issues through regular meetings, such as the deputy minister's coffee group. In 2016, 6 ministerial advisory groups were established to provide advice and recommendations on issues related to policy, service excellence and transition, mental health, families, care and support, and commemoration. A renewal process for the advisory groups was completed in June 2022, which resulted in the appointment of over 30 new members; the appointments were made based on the applicants' qualifications and by adding new, diverse and under-represented voices. On a regular basis, these 6 advisory groups provide advice and recommendations to VAC on important current and future initiatives in support of the Veteran community.

## Intermediate outcome

**Strengthened implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda by Government of Canada and its partners**

## Immediate outcome

**To strengthen the relationship between VAC and its stakeholders in collecting and applying disaggregated data in its decision-making processes**

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<sup>17</sup> [Women Veterans Forum – 2019 - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Virtual Series – Women Veterans' Forum Update and LGBTQ2+ Veterans Roundtable - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

To achieve the above-mentioned immediate outcome, VAC will conduct, or will continue to conduct, the following activities:

- The Health Professionals Division is partnering with the Policy and Research Division at VAC to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for the Veteran population. The CHNA occurred throughout the 2023 calendar year and used a population health approach to identify the strengths and needs of the Veteran community by collecting, analyzing and organizing new and existing data about Veterans. It will create a road map for actions and interventions that support and reduce inequities for all Veterans' care and well-being. CHNA is using the GBA Plus approach to data analysis—cross-tabulation for key GBA Plus demographic characteristics—with a focus on the 5 equity-deserving subgroups outlined in VAC's mandate letter: women, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQI+, Black and racialized Veterans, as well as Veterans with disabilities.
- VAC will work with Statistics Canada to learn about modern-day Canadian Veterans based on data from the 2021 Census, and will produce key Veteran health estimates using the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, the 2022 Canadian Veteran Health Survey and the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey. VAC will use the findings to identify subpopulations of Veterans with greater needs.
- In September 2021, VAC added a team dedicated exclusively to processing disability benefit claims from female applicants. This team continues to develop expertise to ensure it can systematically address the current barriers to timely decisions for female Veterans and continue to close the gap in processing times between female and male applicants. VAC has made significant improvements in processing times on claims from female applicants—the gap in average processing time between male and female applications reduced from 7 weeks in 2019-20 to 1 week as of December 2022. Based on an updated calculation that includes when a payment is made (for favourable decisions), for the first 3 quarters of the 2022-2023 fiscal year (April 1 to December 30), the average turnaround times for first applications were 28.6 weeks for female applicants and 28.1 weeks for male applicants.
- VAC will support the work of the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families as a centre of expertise on PTSD, and related mental health conditions, to advance the understanding of mental health impacts related to women Veterans' unique military experiences and translate this research knowledge into policy and practice by educating policymakers and service providers on the specific needs of this subset of the Veteran population.
- VAC will continue to work with WAGE, the federal government department that is leading the first-ever Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan. VAC's work in this area includes consulting with those impacted by the LGBT Purge about their unique service-related needs and any systemic challenges or barriers they face in accessing programs and services. In addition, VAC will work with academic partners, Veterans' organizations and other stakeholders to study best practices in meeting their needs through direct engagement with staff. VAC aims to foster a culture of openness, understanding and trust when serving vulnerable Veterans. VAC has identified its Chief Medical Officer, who is a woman Veteran, to be the Champion of Women Veterans' Health. She will promote the work of the Office of Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, and take concrete steps to ensure these Veteran groups are supported and have access to the benefits and services that address their unique needs.
- VAC is establishing a Women Veterans Council to bring together women Veterans, women belonging to advocacy organizations and other government representatives focused on furthering women's rights and equality. The goal is to discuss and bring forward advice and recommendations on women Veterans' issues. The council will develop advice and recommendations supported by perspectives gathered from stakeholder consultation and engagement activities and research, and will then present that advice to the department.

# Focus area 6: Inclusion

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## Narrative

The progression of the WPS agenda toward a broader understanding of peace and security, as well as Canada's increased domestic focus, requires that VAC take even more inclusive approaches. As VAC's Veteran client population continues to diversify, the department expects to see an increased need for support for women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, as well as for groups representing a variety of intersecting identity factors, such as race, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion, social status, age, ability, etc. Multiple identity factors intersect and have an impact on individuals' needs and therefore the effectiveness of the benefits, programs and services that are offered. As such, VAC will continue to apply a GBA Plus lens in implementing its programs and services. VAC will continue to foster an intersectional approach and promote greater inclusion within its efforts to provide women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans with the unique support they rightfully deserve. VAC will work diligently to understand, acknowledge and address the root causes of exclusion and take concrete action to remove the barriers.

## Intermediate outcome

**Strengthened integration of intersectional and diverse perspectives in shaping and implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda**

## Immediate outcome

**To strengthen the integration of intersectional and diverse perspectives in shaping and implementing VAC programs, benefits and services to meet the unique needs of women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans**

To achieve the above-mentioned immediate outcomes, VAC will conduct, or will continue to conduct, the following activities:

- VAC will continue the implementation of the GBA Plus strategy to fully integrate GBA Plus into the work at all stages of design, development, implementation, monitoring and decision making. VAC's GBA Plus policy was approved by the Senior Management Committee in January 2023, and the GBA Plus policy and training aids were officially launched in May 2023.
- VAC will support the implementation of the Government of Canada's Policy Direction on the Modernization of Sex and Gender Information Practices through the Gender Inclusive Services project, which outlines best practices for reporting on information related to sex and gender and supports evidence-informed decisions.
- VAC is continuing its work toward GBA Plus by developing and improving data collection, analysis and the assessment of program impacts on gender and diversity. As a first step, VAC is currently working on a plan for Veterans and other clients to report their gender identity voluntarily. VAC is working with Statistics Canada to identify connections between VAC program data and national survey data. Additionally, VAC is in a multi-year modernization of the 2 primary tools that are used to support decision making for disability benefits: the [Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines](#) (EEG) and the [Table of Disabilities](#) (TOD). A GBA Plus methodology has been developed specifically for this work and is being applied to the revisions of each EEG and TOD chapter to ensure that these tools consider the diverse health-related experience of Canadian Veterans. VAC released an EEG for sexual dysfunction in December 2021, which now includes female sexual dysfunction.
- VAC will continue to ensure that research funded by the department conforms to the principles of Sex and Gender Equity in Research, which were formally adopted in the winter of 2021. These guidelines inform how VAC designs, conducts and reports findings to ensure equitable representation of women Veterans and under-represented groups in research initiatives.

- VAC will use new technologies and virtual engagement opportunities to inspire and support Canadian commemoration. As part of these continuing modernization efforts, the department will expand/enhance its digital technology to engage with a variety of Canadian audiences, including educators, youth, Indigenous communities and new Canadians, as well as Veterans of more recent conflicts and peacekeeping missions and those from under-represented communities, including women, Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans.
- For the fiscal year 2022-2023, \$250,000 from the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund was awarded to the Research Institute of McGill University Health Centre, which will conduct a nationwide study with women Veterans to identify factors associated with mental health outcomes, help-seeking needs and preferences across life stages. A total of \$70,000 was awarded to the Canadian Women’s Wellness Initiative, whose project offers stress reduction training in the field-tested Transcendental Meditation program to both male and female Veterans and family members—experiencing elevated levels of stress, operational stress injury or PTSD.

As part of the government-wide priorities of gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness, the Office of the Veterans Ombud will continue to advocate for fairness for Canada’s diverse Veteran population, which includes women, Francophone and Indigenous Veterans, and other groups. The OVO is planning to expand its data collection and is currently identifying and developing new analytics to better report on GBA Plus data.



# Alignment

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Canada is committed to gender equality, empowering women and girls around the world, and promoting their human rights and well-being. Canada is also committed to preventing and responding to conflicts to help build a more peaceful and prosperous world. As such, Canada has adopted the Feminist International Assistance Policy, which seeks to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world. The WPS agenda is at the intersection of these commitments.

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy champions the role of women peacebuilders, focuses on women in peacekeeping and pays increased attention to youth, 2SLGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities. The policy has an anti-racist and decolonial approach to addressing emerging challenges and barriers that face women in all their diversity. The increased focus on inclusion in Canada's third National Action Plan will further advance the Government of Canada's other national action plans, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015); Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy (2019 to 2022); the National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People (2021); and the first Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan (2022).

VAC'S equity actions are keeping pace with the above-mentioned Government of Canada's overarching initiatives to combat inequity and discrimination in their various forms. VAC recognizes that women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized service members and Veterans have played an important role in the country's military efforts over the years. These diverse people continue to contribute to the country's rich history and heritage. VAC acknowledges that women Veterans have specific and unique needs, and that gender-blind or gender-neutral programs and policies will not ensure equitable access. It is against this backdrop that VAC set up the Office of Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans in July 2019, to support the under-represented groups of Veterans. VAC is committed to ongoing engagement and consultation with women veterans and stakeholder groups to identify and address systemic issues specific to the sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation of under-represented sub-groups within the Veteran population. VAC integrates GBA Plus into daily work to advance gender equality, respect diversity and promote inclusion for all Veterans.

VAC is committed to supporting Canada's efforts in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goals. VAC's implementation plan contributes specifically to Goal 5: gender equality and Goal 10: reduced inequalities.

VAC is working collaboratively with women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans and stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard. The department is engaging Veterans with diverse lived experiences to help inform research and the development of benefits, programs and services that impact them. This approach supports the empowerment of historically marginalized groups and equitable outcomes for all. VAC's commitment to becoming an implementing partner on Canada's third National Action Plan will ensure women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans are supported in their meaningful participation in global peace and security efforts at home and abroad.



# Logic model

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## Ultimate outcome

Enhanced peace, security and equality for all people

## Focus areas and immediate outcomes

### Focus area 3: Crisis response

#### Intermediate outcomes

Improved integration of inclusive and gender-responsive interventions to crises in Canada and abroad

#### Immediate outcomes

Improved integration of inclusive and gender-responsive interventions to crises faced by women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans of the CAF and the RCMP

#### Outputs

- A large majority of cases assigned through the VAC Assistance Service are resolved with short-term counselling and without the requirement for additional referrals
- Feedback indicates that users of VAS are satisfied with the services offered/received
- Successful applicants receive a tax-free payment within 1-2 business days through the Veterans Emergency Fund
- Where applicable, applicants to the Veterans Emergency Fund are referred to other VAC programs and external resources to assist them over the longer term
- Through the Veteran Homelessness Program, funding is provided for rent supplements and wraparound services, such as counselling and treatment for substance use, and for research on Veteran homelessness and capacity building
- Veterans have access to coverage for the treatment of mental health conditions, even as they await their Disability Benefits decision
- The safety and well-being of the most vulnerable clients, often women and children, is assured during crisis situations

#### Activities

- Continue to offer Veterans, families and caregivers free online referrals, confidential psychological support and free access to pastoral care services, bereavement services and online mental health resources with VAS
- Continue to provide emergency financial assistance, along with the Veterans Emergency Fund, to Veterans and their families, who are facing an immediate financial crisis that threatens their health or well-being
- Contribute to the Veteran Homelessness Program led by Infrastructure Canada
- Continue to offer automatic eligibility to Mental Health Benefits to CAF Veterans applying for a disability benefit for certain mental health conditions

- Activate emergency response protocols, through VAC Field Operations, during crisis situations

## Inputs

Financial resources (operations and maintenance; and capital), human resources (full-time equivalents) and policy advice

## Focus area 4: Sexual and gender-based violence

### Intermediate outcomes

Enhanced gender-responsive prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts or perpetrated by actors working in peace, humanitarian, international development and security sectors in Canada or abroad

### Immediate outcomes

Enhanced gender-responsive prevention and response to women Veterans who experienced sexual or gender-based violence while they were serving in the CAF

## Outputs

- Serving members and Veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma are supported
- The voices of individuals who have experienced military sexual trauma are heard, and the impact on their loved ones' lives is understood
- Updated VAC policies inform about programs, benefits and services to address the needs of military sexual trauma survivors
- Women, Black, Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ Canadian Forces members and Veterans affected by sexual misconduct are supported through collective understanding and policy change
- VAC staff have increased awareness of the resources available to best support Veterans and their families who are impacted by sexual misconduct
- VAC staff have increased knowledge and improved skills related to sexual trauma disclosures

## Activities

- Continue to partner with CAF/DND on activities related to/provided by the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre
- Review VAC policies for Veterans and CAF members who have applied for benefits involving any medical condition resulting from military sexual trauma, and update programs, benefits and services accordingly
- Continue to work with the Military Sexual Trauma Community of Practice
- Offer VAC staff a professional development opportunity, through Field Operations, that is specific to sexual trauma: a course entitled Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Trauma

## Inputs

Financial resources (operations and maintenance; and capital), human resources (full-time equivalents) and policy advice

## Focus area 5: Leadership and capabilities

### Intermediate outcomes

Strengthened implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda by the Government of Canada and its partners

### Immediate outcomes

Strengthened relationship between VAC and its stakeholders in collecting and applying disaggregated data in its decision-making processes

### Outputs

- The strengths and needs of the Veteran community are identified
- Inequities related to Veteran well-being are reduced
- Subpopulations of Veterans with greater needs are identified using Statistics Canada data
- Barriers to timely decisions for Disability Benefits for female applicants are systematically addressed
- The gap in processing times between male and female applicants for Disability Benefits applications is reduced or eliminated
- The understanding of mental health impacts related to women Veterans' unique military experiences is advanced
- Research knowledge regarding the mental health impacts of military service on women Veterans is translated into policy and practice
- A culture of openness, understanding and trust is fostered in the way VAC serves vulnerable Veterans

### Activities

- Conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment for the Veteran population throughout calendar year 2023, including a focus on women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans
- Work with Statistics Canada to: a) learn about modern-day Canadian Veterans based on data from the 2021 Census and b) produce key Veteran health estimates using numerous recent surveys
- Continue to systematically address the current barriers to timely decisions for female Veterans Disability Benefit claims processing team, and continue to close the gap in processing times between female and male applicants
- Support the work of the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families as a centre of expertise on post-traumatic stress disorder and related mental health conditions
- As part of our work with Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada, continue to consult with those impacted by the LGBT Purge about their unique service-related needs and any systemic challenges or barriers they face in accessing programs and services

### Inputs

Financial resources (operations and maintenance; and capital), human resources (full-time equivalents) and policy advice

## Focus area 6: Inclusion

### Intermediate outcomes

Strengthened integration of intersectional and diverse perspectives in shaping and implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda

### Immediate outcomes

Strengthened integration of intersectional and diverse perspectives in shaping and implementing VAC programs, benefits and services to meet the unique needs of women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans

### Outputs

- GBA Plus is fully integrated into VAC's work at all stages of design, development, implementation, monitoring and decision making
- Best practices for reporting on information related to sex and gender are implemented, thereby supporting evidence-informed decisions
- Data collection, analysis and assessment of program impacts on gender and diversity are developed and improved
- Engagement with a variety of audiences, including women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, Indigenous and racialized Veterans is enhanced as part of the modernization of commemorative opportunities
- Research and projects benefiting Veterans including women Veterans and their families are undertaken

### Activities

- Continue the implementation of VAC's GBA Plus strategy
- Continue to support the implementation of the Government of Canada's Policy Direction on the Modernization of Sex and Gender Information Practices through the Gender Inclusive Services Project
- Continue working on a plan for Veterans and other clients to voluntarily report their gender identity
- Continue to work with Statistics Canada to identify connections between VAC program data and national survey data
- Continue to review and modernize the Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines and the Table of Disabilities, the 2 primary tools that support decision making for Disability Benefits.
- Continue to ensure that research funded by the department conforms to the principles of Sex and Gender Equity in Research
- Use new technologies and virtual engagement opportunities to inspire and support Canadian commemoration
- Continue to provide funding, through the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund, toward research and initiatives intended to support Veterans and their families
- The Office of the Veterans Ombud will expand data collection and identify and develop new analytics to better report on GBA Plus data
- The Office of the Veterans Ombud continues to advocate for fairness for Canada's diverse Veteran population, including women Veterans

**Inputs**

Financial resources (operations and maintenance; and capital), human resources (full-time equivalents) and policy advice

