

OFFICE OF WOMEN AND LGBTQ2 VETERANS

- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) created the Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans in July 2019 in response to concerns raised by women and other under-represented groups of Veterans, and to contribute to key federal government commitments to advance gender equality, diversity and inclusion.
- The mandate of the Office is to work with all branches of the Department, Veterans, stakeholder organizations and other federal departments and agencies to identify and address systemic issues and/or barriers specific to women and LGBTQ2 Veterans and their families.
- We are committed to continuing the dialogue with all these groups to share, learn and collaboratively address issues and/or barriers faced by under-represented groups of Veterans.
- The Office intends to influence research, policy and program development and implementation, support an informed and inclusive delivery of programs and services, and provide ongoing advice to advance equality for all Veterans.

BACKGROUND – THE OFFICE OF WOMEN AND LGBTQ2 VETERANS

Women and LGBTQ2 service members have represented Canada in uniform for more than a century. The Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans was created by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) in July 2019 in response to recurring concerns raised by women and other under-represented sub-groups of Veterans, and to contribute to key federal government commitments to advance gender equality, diversity and inclusion. This Office will help the Department fulfill its responsibility to provide all Veterans the care and support they deserve. There is much to be done, but the work of the new office and discussions with women and LGBTQ2 Veterans will help to positively shape the future of the Department.

The mandate of the Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans is to work with all branches at VAC and Veteran stakeholders to identify and address systemic issues and/or barriers specific to women and LGBTQ2 Veterans and their families. The Office will help the Department position itself to continue to meet the changing needs of our Veterans and their families into the future and provide the best service possible.

The Office intends to influence research, policy and program development and implementation, support an informed and inclusive delivery of programs and services, and provide ongoing advice to advance equality for all Veterans.

This Office was officially announced by the Minister in March 2020.

The idea for the Office stems from discussions held during the first ever annual WomenVeterans Forum held in Charlottetown in 2019. Since then, the Department has consulted with numerous Veterans and stakeholders to identify barriers specific to women and LGBTQ2 Veterans and their families. We know from these discussions that the specific needs of women and LGBTQ2 Veterans have not been fully addressed, and that more work needs to be done to understand and support these individuals.

Veterans have diverse lived experiences and different service-related needs. The Office aims to identify these needs and work with Veteran communities, partners and other federal departments and agencies to help ensure fair access to treatment and services based on these needs. We

are committed to ongoing dialogue with various stakeholder groups to share, learn and work collaboratively to address barriers for Veterans, regardless of their biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or other identity factors. We will continue to help influence research, develop ideas and solutions to challenges, and promote strong collaboration among Veterans and stakeholder groups.

Veterans Affairs Canada's Annual Women Veterans Forum

Women currently make up 15 percent of the Canadian Armed Forces. In 2016, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) committed to increasing the representation of women by 1% annually over the following 10 years to achieve 25% representation by 2026 (*Strong, Secure and Engaged, Canada's Defence Policy*). Through service to our country with courage and sacrifice, women are contributing to peace and security around the globe. Veterans Affairs Canada is working to address women Veterans' specific needs by collaborating with women Veterans, researchers and partner organizations.

To gain a better understanding of the current status of women Veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada hosted the first ever Canadian Women Veterans Forum in May 2019. Held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, the forum brought together Veterans, researchers, experts and organizational leaders to discuss specific challenges women face in their life after service.

The forum highlighted central themes including the need for more targeted programs and services, additional research, greater collaboration, enhanced outreach and an integrated approach to Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) (discussed in greater detail below).

The Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans worked closely with Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach and a Steering Committee comprised of women Veterans and stakeholders to develop the 2020 Women Veterans Forum Update. Given the current COVID 19 pandemic, the 2020 Forum Update included an online virtual series of three panels with the expectation of still having a face-to-face Forum once the COVID 19 restrictions are lifted by public health officials

Following the conclusion of the three panels for women Veterans in September, 2020, VAC convened a LGBTQ2 Veterans Planning

Committee and hosted the first ever Roundtable on LGBTQ2 Veterans on October 21, 2020.

On 28 November 2017, the Prime Minister of Canada delivered a [formal apology](#) to LGBTQ2 federal public servants, Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP who were affected by federal legislation, policies and practices that led to the oppression of—and discrimination against—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and two-spirit people in Canada. This discrimination is often referred to as the “LGBT Purge.”

Veterans Affairs Canada collaborated with stakeholders to advance gender equality, diversity and inclusion for all Veterans and this Roundtable provided an opportunity for LGBTQ2+ Veterans, Purge survivors and stakeholder groups to share their experiences and ask questions of VAC senior leaders.

Gender Inclusive Services

In September 2018, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and the Department of Justice Canada presented a report to the Clerk of the Privy Council with recommendations on ways to modernize how the Government of Canada handles information on sex and gender.

Since then, TBS has dedicated resources to support departments and agencies in implementing the recommendations of the report. All departments and agencies have been asked to examine their practices for collecting, using and displaying information about sex and gender with a view of ensuring more inclusive services. By completing the assessment tool developed by TBS, VAC has determined that some changes will be required in the following areas to be aligned with the new policy direction on Modernizing the Government of Canada’s Sex and Gender Information Practices:

- Introducing a non-binary gender option (“Another Gender”);
- Collecting “Gender” information by default rather than “Sex” information;
- Collecting of both Sex and Gender information where necessary to fulfill the specific needs of programs and services and to support GBA+;
- Adopting gender inclusive writing and correspondence practices; and

- Introducing a respectful and supportive mechanism/process to allow Veterans to change and/or amend sex and/or gender information on their VAC file.

In the next stage, it is expected that the department will integrate more gender inclusive policies, practices and services into VAC's broader modernization efforts.

Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Strategy

Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people experience policies, programs and services based on multiple factors including race, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability, among others.

The Department's first Gender-Based Analysis Plus Strategy was finalized in April 2020. Six interdependent 'pillars' of action form the framework for mainstreaming GBA+ and include: Information and awareness; Data collection; Analysis and planning; Tools and training; Implementation and compliance; and Monitoring and evaluation.

The Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans has the functional responsibility of GBA+ within the Department. This role includes leading VAC's GBA+ Network and supporting the implementation of the GBA+ Strategy.

Equality Plan for Veterans

A strategic plan starting to focus on equality for Veterans is currently being developed. This plan will align with the broader GBA+ Strategy, as well as support the National Gender Equality Action Plan led by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada. As of August 2020, consultation has been completed with VAC Director Generals on the draft plan. The Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans hopes to present the plan for senior management approval in late Fall, 2020.