

INDIGENOUS VETERANS

- Our Government is committed to supporting and recognizing Indigenous Veterans, and contributing to reconciliation. A key priority is to ensure that Indigenous Veterans are aware of Veterans Affairs' programs and services and are getting the services they need.
- Our newly implemented Indigenous Veterans Engagement Team, staffed by indigenous Veterans and allies, conducted nearly **150 engagements**, collaborating with Indigenous Veterans, their families and their communities.
- We do outreach to Veterans and their families living in northern and remote Indigenous communities. We conduct **12 outreach visits per year**, a practice we have maintained since 2017.
- Our outreach efforts also extend through ongoing partnerships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations, ensuring that Indigenous Veterans are well-supported across the country.
- Indigenous Veterans also play an active role in VAC forums, including the recent Stakeholder Summit, Women's Forum, and 2SLGBTQI+ Forum.

Indigenous Veterans

Source: Commemoration & Public Affairs with Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance

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- At the Stakeholder Summit, **11% of participants identified as Indigenous**, reflecting the growing involvement of Indigenous Veterans in these important discussions.
- In April of 2023, we signed a Letter of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations. The LOU highlights joint priorities in Veteran engagement, outreach, and commemoration.
- We have identified a senior official to serve as the Indigenous Veteran Champion. A team of Indigenous employees, several of whom are Veterans, has been assembled to support our ongoing commitment.

WHEN PRESSED

Q1 – What concretely is VAC doing to support Indigenous Veterans?

We have supported a number of commemorative projects and memorials dedicated to Indigenous Veterans. To date in the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Commemorative Partnership Program has approved 24 projects for a total of \$349,168 in funding for projects in Indigenous communities or projects commemorating the contributions of Indigenous Veterans.

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Commemorative Partnership Program approved 31 projects for a total of approximately \$213,000 in funding for projects in Indigenous communities or projects commemorating the contributions of Indigenous Veterans.

In 2022-23, the Commemorative Partnership Program approved 27 Indigenous projects for a total of approximately \$346,000 in funding for projects in Indigenous communities.

The Department develops learning materials and exhibits to showcase Canada's diverse culture, including Indigenous Canadians. With this in mind, the stories of Indigenous Canadian Veterans are consistently featured across all of VAC's print, digital, social media and multimedia products. This includes millions of learning materials distributed to schools across Canada each year in advance of Veterans' Week and Remembrance Day. As part of VAC's 2024 Veterans' Week materials, the Department distributed more than 25,000 Recognition Cards featuring a compelling portrait of Chief Joseph Dreaver painted by Salteaux/Cree artist Mike Holden. The accompanying lesson plan and materials raise awareness of Chief Dreaver's service in both the First and Second World Wars and as an advocate for Indigenous rights. They also explore the history of Indigenous service across Canada's military history and the challenges encountered by many Indigenous Veterans. We are currently working with the Canadian War Museum and Chief Dreaver's family to further enhance the card's use with creation of a new video.

In 2020-2021, VAC funded two Indigenous organizations through the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund. Ksalsuti Wellness Resources, a Mi'qmaq non-profit organization located in Oromocto, NB, was awarded \$6,750 to partner with the Gagetown Military Family Resource Centre to develop new programs for Veterans and their families. The "Turtle Island" sessions supported the social and emotional Well-being of children and their caregivers, while honouring the heritage and culture of their ancestors.

The Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans Association (SFNVA) was awarded \$120,000 from the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund to create teams of First Nation Indigenous Veterans

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researchers. These researchers investigated much needed life-sustaining and gender specific services for all First Nations male and female Veterans, peacekeepers, and volunteers.

In 2022-2023, we funded the Southern Chiefs Organization for a total of \$500,000 through the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund. This project is engaging First Nations Veterans to inform the development of culturally relevant services. In 2021-22, we funded the Assembly of First Nations for a total of \$500,000. Funding from the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund supports the Assembly of First Nations in enhancing services and communications for First Nations Veterans. This initiative also seeks to gain valuable insights directly from these Veterans to better understand and address their unique needs.

Budget 2024 provided an additional \$6 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, for the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund. A portion of the funding will focus on projects for Indigenous Veterans along with women Veterans and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans.

The Indigenous Veterans Team was established in spring 2023. Since then the team has been meeting with Indigenous communities in various locations across the country. The Department has also been working closely with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Veterans Council in accordance with a Letter of Understanding signed in April 2023. The team is also building stronger relationships with Métis and Inuit Veterans.

In early 2023, a group of Canadian, Indigenous and Dutch individuals created the *Indigenous Legacy Project*, a research and remembrance based initiative to identify and mark the graves of Indigenous soldiers buried in cemeteries across the Netherlands. Veterans Affairs Canada recognized the importance of this initiative by supporting a delegation to the Netherlands. The delegation included family members and representatives from 13 of the recently identified Indigenous soldiers, Elders, representatives from Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones. This was an opportunity for those connected to the Indigenous soldiers to honour their ancestors and reconnect with their shared history.

Additionally, we are partnering with others, such as Canadian Rangers, the Royal Canadian Legion, Service Canada and Indigenous Services Canada to increase awareness of our programs and service.

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BACKGROUND – INDIGENOUS VETERANS

Canada's Indigenous Peoples - First Nations, Métis and Inuit - have a proud tradition of military service. While exact numbers are difficult to determine, the rate of Indigenous participation in Canada's military has been significant. It is estimated that as many as 12,000 Indigenous people from Canada served voluntarily in the two world wars, with at least 500 of them losing their lives.

The 2021 Census was the first time since 1971 that a question on military service was included. In total, there were 23,075 Indigenous Veterans counted in the census, including 10,950 First Nations, 10,440 Métis, and 755 Inuk (Inuit), as well as 930 with other/multiple affiliations. Indigenous Veterans accounted for 5.2% of Veterans in private households.

Remembrance and Honouring Service: Recognizing the military service of Indigenous Peoples is an important part of our commemorative efforts. Every day we work to help Canadians make a personal connection with remembrance. We are sharing the compelling stories of Indigenous Veterans through our learning materials for schools and in our exhibits at the Vimy and Beaumont-Hamel sites in France. We are ensuring Indigenous inclusion in our commemorative events in Canada and abroad and we are providing funding support to organizations for projects focusing on honouring the service of Indigenous Veterans.

The National Aboriginal Veterans Monument (Ottawa, Ontario) honours the contributions of all Indigenous people in war and peace support operations from the First World War to today. The Francis Paghmagabow Monument (Parry Sound, Ontario) serves to commemorate Canada's most decorated Indigenous soldier of the First World War.

In March 2021, the Commemorative Partnership Program (CPP) Terms and Conditions were amended to provide greater support to Indigenous communities. For war memorial projects in Indigenous communities, recipients may now be reimbursed up to 100% of eligible expenditures, not exceeding a maximum of \$50,000. In 2022-23, the CPP approved three community war memorial projects commemorating the contributions of Indigenous Veterans for a total of \$123,275. In 2023-2024, the CPP approved one community war memorial project commemorating the contributions of Indigenous Veterans for a total of \$45,200.

Serving Indigenous Veterans: We remain committed to offering high quality services to all Veterans regardless of where they live in Canada, including those living in urban, rural, remote and northern communities. Through ongoing Case Management service offering, our service teams provide services to all parts of Canada including rural and remote communities. Veterans living in those communities or on reserve can also receive in person home visits on an as needed basis.

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Veterans Affairs Canada has published two videos in Inuktitut and Northern Cree, intended for Canadian Rangers. Posters and banners in Indigenous languages have also been developed to further outreach in Northern Territories. Officials are working to develop information on our programs and services in the most common Indigenous languages.

We are building on successes to expand our reach within Indigenous communities and increase awareness of our benefits and services and share messages of remembrance and recognition for Indigenous Veterans. We are doing this by meeting with Veterans in their communities and engaging them in discussion about VAC's benefits and services.

Other developments: In December 2020, the Assembly of First Nations officially announced the creation of a First Nations Veterans Council. Departmental officials are establishing regular contacts with the Veterans Council to explore collaborative opportunities to better respond to the needs of First Nations Veterans and their families.

MÉTIS VETERANS

- The Government of Canada recognizes the sacrifices and achievements of all Métis Veterans.
- The Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement was signed in June 2019 between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Métis National Council.
- The Agreement was established to address concerns raised by the Métis Nation with regard to the treatment of Second World War Métis Veterans, and provides eligible Veterans and their survivors with a \$20,000 recognition payment. Funds are also available through the Agreement to commemorate Métis Veterans' sacrifices and contributions.
- The Government of Canada is committed to continue working collaboratively with the Métis National Council to ensure that Métis Veterans get the recognition they deserve.

WHEN PRESSED:

Q1 – What is Veterans Affairs Canada’s (VAC) response to the statement of claim filed by the Métis National Council?

VAC is not a party to these legal proceedings, though the Department is aware that a legal action has commenced. VAC supports the objectives and the sound administration of the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement to recognize and commemorate Second World War Métis Veterans.

Q2 – Was VAC aware of the breaches listed in the statement of claim?

VAC has established a positive working relationship with the new administration of the Métis National Council. The Department is working with them to support the objectives of the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement and ensure that Métis Veterans receive the recognition they deserve.

Q3 – What is VAC’s involvement in these proceedings?

VAC is not a party to these legal proceedings. The Department is committed to working collaboratively with the Métis National Council to ensure that Métis Veterans receive the recognition they deserve.

Q4 – Who is in charge of the MVRP?

The Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement is between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Métis National Council. The Métis National Council is responsible for administering the funding and implementing the objectives of the Agreement. The Government of Canada is committed to continue working collaboratively with the Métis National Council to ensure that Métis Veterans get the recognition they deserve.

Q5 – Why did VAC give a \$30M lump sum contribution to the Métis National Council?

The Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Agreement was developed as a contribution to address the longstanding concerns expressed by the Métis Nation related to the pre and post-war experiences of Métis Veterans. The Agreement was undertaken with the Métis National Council for administration and distribution in the spirit of reconciliation, self-determination and furthering Métis self-government.

BACKGROUND — MÉTIS VETERANS

Métis are one of three recognized Indigenous peoples in Canada, along with First Nations and Inuit. Métis Veterans, who represent approximately 45% of all Indigenous Veterans, were excluded from the 2002 First Nations ex-gratia payment as there was no evidence available at the time to indicate that Métis Veterans did not receive demobilization benefits.

The 2021 Census was the first time since 1971 that a question on military service was included. In total, there were 23,075 Indigenous Veterans counted in the census, including 10,950 First Nations, 10,440 Métis, and 755 Inuk (Inuit), as well as 930 with other/multiple affiliations. Indigenous Veterans accounted for 5.2% of Veterans in private households.

On 13 June 2019, the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement of \$30 million was signed. The Métis National Council administers this program to recognize Second World War Métis Veterans for their pre and post-war experiences, and support commemorative initiatives that promote awareness and appreciation of Métis Veterans' sacrifices and contributions.

Under the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement, the Métis National Council launched the Métis Veterans Legacy Program and reported to VAC that they, as of 29 June 2021, a total of 75 Recognition Payments have been awarded to Second World War Métis Veterans and survivors. On 22 February 2021, the Métis National Council launched their Commemorative Program and has established a committee to review commemorative proposals and appeals. VAC is not aware of any proposals that have been approved by the MNC.

On 29 September 2021, the Manitoba Métis Federation withdrew from the Métis National Council.

Cassidy Caron was elected as President of the Métis National Council Secretariat Inc. on 30 September 2021.

On 27 January 2022, President Caron filed a statement of claim with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice against former executive members of the Métis National Council and the Manitoba Métis Federation for breach of their respective fiduciary, statutory and other legal duties.

The Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement is referenced in the statement of claim (Purported Veterans Fund Assignment and Conversion) in relation to the above mentioned breaches.

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A case management judge has now been assigned to the file and the process will move towards discovery in the upcoming months.

The current Métis National Council administration have finalized their recognition payment application process and have once again begun awarding payments to eligible Veterans.

The Métis National Council met with Veterans Affairs Canada representatives in July 2023 and again in July 2024 to discuss a number of topics including the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement, as well as commemoration.

Veterans Affairs Canada continues to support the Métis National Council as they recognize eligible Métis Veterans and their families.