

FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

- Veterans Affairs Canada recognizes the central-role families and caregivers play in supporting the well-being of Veterans.
- Eligible family members and survivors can access mental health treatments, health care benefits, vocational assistance, as well as financial support.
- The Caregiver Recognition Benefit provides a monthly, tax-free \$1,000 (indexed annually by the Consumer Price Index) payment directly to eligible Veterans' informal caregivers to recognize the contribution that caregivers play in improving the health and well-being of ill and injured Veterans.
- The VAC Assistance Line and various online resources are available for families and caregivers through programs like Life Speak.
- Peer support is offered through the Operational Stress Injury Social Support Program, as well as the Veteran Family Program.

WHEN PRESSED:

Q1 – Will the new mental health benefit be available to spouses and family members?

Family members are not eligible to apply for mental health benefits. If a client is receiving mental health benefits coverage and their mental health professional believes that involving family members in treatment will achieve positive outcomes for the client, family members may qualify to receive mental health services.

Q2 – Did the Caregiver Recognition Benefit policy update that occurred in January 2022 consider the needs of Veterans with mental health conditions?

The Caregiver Recognition Benefit policy has been clarified to include clearer direction about the benefit's eligibility criteria, especially in relation to Veterans with mental health conditions. In addition, the clarified policy states that decisions need to be based on the Veteran's **current** state of health.

Q3 – Why can family members not access mental health treatment in their own right?

A Veteran's family members may be involved in mental health services if the treating mental health professional indicates that it is required to support the Veteran's recovery.

Q4 – What services are available to spouses to support employment?

Career Transition Services is available to spouses and survivors. Spouses and survivors may also be able to access vocational assistance through VAC's Rehabilitation Program if the Veteran has been deemed unable to participate in vocational rehabilitation.

Q5 – Are there other services or programs that would allow family members to access health treatments?

Group Health Insurance can be accessed through the Public Service Health Care Plan under Veterans Affairs Canada. Veterans can choose the coverage that is right for them and are responsible for paying the monthly contributions.

Veteran Family Telemedicine Service is now available for medically releasing Veterans and their families who have one year following release to apply for a one-year period of virtual access to primary healthcare providers including prescriptions and renewals, lab requisitions, doctor's notes and specialist referrals.

BACKGROUND — FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Veterans Affairs Canada recognizes the important role families and caregivers play in assisting Veteran well-being. There are a number of programs and services within VAC's suite of programs accessible by families and caregivers.

There can be considerable strain on the overall mental health of a family when a Veteran is facing an Operational Stress Injury. The Mental Health (POC 12) policy at VAC describes mental health services that may be funded as part of a Veteran's treatment or rehabilitation plan, including mental health services for family members. Its purpose is to enable funding of mental health services for family members in support of the Veteran's treatment. This includes funding for family, group and/or couples counselling (where the Veteran is present), and individual or group counselling (where the Veteran is not present), as provided by licensed mental health professionals, such as psychologists and social workers.

In March 2020, the Minister instructed the Mental Health policy be applied using care, compassion, and maximum flexibility in all cases. On May 6, 2020, VAC issued a new guideline, Guideline for Funding Mental Health Services Involving Veteran's Family Member(s) indicating the following:

- Treatment Benefits: Family members may be involved in mental health services when the Veteran's treating mental health professional indicates it is required for the Veteran's recovery.
- Rehabilitation Program: Family members may be involved in mental health services when the Veteran's assessing or treating professional identifies that it will help meet the Veteran's rehabilitation goal.

The Department offers additional services to Veterans' family members, such as:

- Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service (1-800-268-7708) or TDD (1-800-567-5803): A 24-hour toll-free help line that offers face-to-face and virtual psychological support.
- Health Care: For families that may be accessed through the Public Service Health Care Plan through Veterans Affairs Canada.
- Operational Stress Injury Clinics: A network of 11 sites where family members can attend educational sessions and counselling.
- Operational Stress Injury Social Support Service (OSISS): Trained peer support coordinators offer confidential peer support.
- Veteran Family Program: Available for medically released Veterans and their families at all of the 32 Military Family Resource Centers across Canada. This includes access to a suite of transition services, as well as the Family Information Line and CFWMS.ca (previously CAFconnection.ca).

- Veteran Family Telemedicine Service: A pilot initiative between VAC and the Military Family Services (MFS) that is available for medically releasing Veterans and their families. After release, members have up to one year to apply for access to this service which then will give them and their families one year of access to Virtual Health Services such as prescriptions and renewals, lab requisitions, doctor's notes and specialist referrals. Caregiver Recognition Benefit: A monthly, tax-free \$1,206.87* (2024 rate) payment made directly to an eligible Veteran's designated informal caregiver to recognize the contribution they make to the Veteran's health and well-being.
*Amount is indexed annually by the Consumer Price Index.
- Mental Health First Aid: A virtual mental health literacy training available for members of the Veteran community, including family members and caregivers.
- Online Resources: PTSD Coach Canada, the Operational Stress Injury Connect mobile applications, Life Speak, and the Operational Stress Injury Resource for Caregivers.
- Vocational Assistance: May be available to a Veteran's spouse through VAC's Rehabilitation Program if the Veteran has been deemed unable to participate in vocational rehabilitation.
- Career Transition Services: Accessible by a Veteran's spouse or survivor.
- Financial programs: May be available for surviving spouses and children if the Veteran's death is service related.
- Veterans Independence Program: Helps eligible individuals (spouses, survivors, and/or dependents) remain independent and self-sufficient in their home and community with ground maintenance and housekeeping services.