

# Military Sexual Trauma

## Issue

In Canada, sexual misconduct and/or military sexual trauma (MST) is described as conduct of a sexual nature that can cause or causes harm to others and takes place within the military. Sexual misconduct and/or MST can occur in the physical work location or in the greater work environment where work-related activities take place and working relationships exist. It can also occur while one is on or off duty, on or off-base, deployed or not deployed.

Sexual misconduct and/or MST are not clinical diagnoses but rather terms used to describe the physiological, physical, and social impacts or 'wounds' that people who experience or witness sexual misconduct and/or MST may feel. It is an event or an accumulation of events that may lead to illnesses or injuries that meet the criteria for diagnosable mental health conditions. People who have experienced sexual misconduct and/or MST are at an increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

An identified need for culture change within DND-CAF and support for those affected by sexual misconduct and/or MST led to an increased focus by the Government of Canada. A funding allocation of \$44.7 million was made in Budget 2021 to address sexual misconduct and gender-based violence within the CAF/DND and to support survivors. Budget 2021 funding also directed joint collaboration between DND and VAC to develop and establish a Peer Support Program specific to current and former CAF members (Veterans) who were impacted by sexual trauma or sexual misconduct during their service.

## Context

The MST Peer Support Program is jointly delivered by the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre (SMSRC) and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). The program offers peer support services to people affected by sexual misconduct and/or MST during their service or in their workplace. These include CAF members, Veterans/former CAF members, Cadets and Junior Canadian Rangers, and current and former DND public service employees 18 years of age and older.

VAC and the SMSRC have co-developed peer support programming using a human-centred design approach. Consultations held with people with lived experience indicated that the program needed to be flexible, well communicated, safe and inclusive, and have choices in the service delivery format.

The first Formal Peer Support Groups began in June 2023. Since then, the program has successfully completed 10 Formal Peer Support Groups, introduced Informal Peer Support Groups in May 2024, and hosted two English-language groups. In July and August 2024, we hosted our first Peer Support Activity, *Discover Creative Coping*. Since then, we have hosted two additional activities: the *Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week Peer Support Event* in November 2024 and the *Holiday Peer Support Activity* in December 2024. New Formal and

Informal Peer Support Groups will commence in Winter 2025 and will be offered in both official languages. In addition to the peer support groups, the SMSRC is actively working on the development of a text- and chat-based application called *Confide*, and the offering of one-to-one peer support services.

## Key Data

- Established Peer Support Program Model – February 2022
- Published [What We Heard Consultation Report](#) – March 2022
- Program Development:
  - Mental Health Professional hired for VAC for Formal Peer Support Group program development and facilitation – Fall 2022 and Ongoing
  - Recruitment and training of Peer Supporters – Winter 2023 and Ongoing
  - Development of educational material completed for Formal Peer Support Group Initial Launch – Spring 2023
- Between June 2023 and November of 2024, a series of 10 Formal Peer Support Groups were held, engaging a total of 36 participants. All sessions were held virtually (9 in English and 1 in French).
  - Formal Peer Support Groups are educational peer support groups led by a trained peer supporter with lived experience and a mental health professional.
  - One of the 10 formal peer support groups was a men's group, which launched in March 2024.
- Informal Peer Support Group – May 2024 and Ongoing
  - The informal groups allow for ongoing connection and support among peers in a less formal setting. They offer up to eight sessions and are led by two trained peer supporters.
- Long Term funding beyond FY 24/25 for the MST PSP program is not yet confirmed. VAC and SMSRC/DND-CAF are working closely to identify options.

## Key Update

- Community Consultations led by the SMSRC Partnerships Team were completed in May 2024. These consultations provided an opportunity to discuss the Informal Peer Support Group service and gather feedback on additional peer support services that could benefit the community. The insights from these discussions were compiled into a summary report, a draft of which was shared with the Peer Support Program leads in November 2024 and will be used to inform and implement program improvements moving forward. SMSRC is working on a final version of the report.

- SMSRC is actively working on a *text-and-talk* application and the development of *one-to-one services*. These initiatives are being led by the SMSRC, though a timeline for their launch has not yet been announced.
- SMSRC-DND have led on a budget submission for the Fall Economic Statement for the MST PSP program. VAC provided FTE and O&M costing as part of the submission for their contribution to the MST PSP program.
- SMSRC-DND will be submitting to B2025 process. Timing TBD.