

A person wearing a military-style jacket with several Canadian flags pinned to the sleeves. The background is dark and slightly blurred, focusing attention on the person and the text.

# VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FEDERAL HOUSING  
ADVOCATE TO ADDRESS VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Presentation by: Sandrine Desforges  
Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' Annual Conference in Halifax  
November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023





# Agenda

- Context
- Methodology
- Key findings
- Policy recommendations





# Learning objectives

1. Understand risk factors for homelessness experienced by veterans, and the unique realities and needs of veterans experiencing homelessness
2. Identify gaps in existing solutions
3. Identify potential policy recommendations

# Context

- Capstone project



- Sponsored by  
the Federal Housing Advocate

- Challenge:  
*What federal policies and programs are needed to ensure meaningful reductions in veteran homelessness and advance the right to adequate housing for all veterans in Canada?*

# Team



Taylor Chase



Alison Clement



Sandrine Desforges



Anmol Gupta

Coach: Vincent Rigby  
Coordinator: Nathalie Duchesnay



# Methodology

- Academic and grey literature review
  - 2017 National Housing Strategy
  - 2019 Standing Committee on VA report
  - 2022 Auditor General report on Chronic Homelessness
- Stakeholder interviews (32)
  - Government or Crown corporations
  - National Indigenous organizations
  - Homelessness-related organizations
  - Veterans-serving organizations
  - Academia and research
  - Equity-seeking groups
  - Jurisdictions

## Constraints

Broad scope

Inability to meet with individuals experiencing homelessness

Rapid evolution of the policy landscape

Limited time

Absence of funding

# Key findings

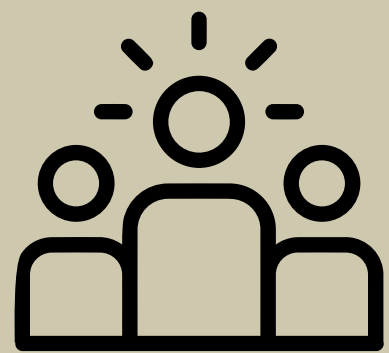
- There remains a lack of federal departmental leadership on the issue.
- There are significant discrepancies in the reported numbers and identities of veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Former Canadian Armed Forces members who do not meet Canada's definition of a veteran are exposed to additional risks of experiencing homelessness.
- Many unhoused veterans are reluctant to self-identify as veterans, hindering the delivery of existing benefits and services.

# Key findings

- Services do not meet the needs of women and gender-diverse veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Some individuals entering the armed forces have preexisting risk factors for homelessness.
- The Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada inadequately support veterans in their transition to civilian life.
- Veterans-serving organizations face challenges financing the development of veterans housing projects.

# Overview of recommendations

## Foundational policy recommendations



Primary  
leadership



Shared and  
accurate  
understanding



Immediate  
housing  
supports



Veteran-  
specific  
housing supply



Transition from  
military to  
civilian life

## Core policy recommendations



# Human rights-based approach

- People-centered and right to self-determination
- Non-discrimination
- Substantive equality
- Participatory mechanisms
- Progressive realization
- Accountability and progress reporting

# Primary leadership



Problem



Solution



Considerations

Lack of federal leadership  
on veteran homelessness

Amend the *Department of  
Veterans Affairs Act*

Dependent on  
political process

337,993 veterans are  
**unregistered** with VAC

Adopt a  
**preventative approach**  
to service delivery

**Capacity building** required  
to onboard  
unregistered veterans

VAC has limited exposure  
to individuals  
with lived experience

Create a VAC veteran  
homelessness  
**advisory council**

Broad **representation**  
of people with lived  
experience needed

# Shared and accurate understanding



## Problem



## Solution



## Considerations

Limited understanding of  
veteran homelessness

Onboard veteran-serving  
organizations onto  
local data platforms

Some veteran organizations  
lack technical capacity

Weak data on  
**pre-existing risk factors**  
for homelessness

**Collect data**  
during onboarding  
to the military

Disaggregate data  
to respect  
privacy and confidentiality

VAC's current definition  
**excludes those most at risk**

Investigate limitations  
of VAC's definition

Current federal programs  
and policies use  
different definitions



# Immediate housing supports



**Problem**



**Solution**



**Considerations**

Insufficient programs to help veterans find housing

Establish a  
**Veteran Housing Certificate Program**

Capacity building required to implement the program

Slow access to funds for at-risk veterans

**Veteran Emergency Fund** distributed by veterans-serving organizations

Leverage trust with veteran organizations for funding distribution

# Veteran-specific housing supply



**Problem**



**Solution**



**Considerations**

Land acquisition challenges for veteran housing projects

Develop veteran-specific stream within the Federal Lands Initiative

Veteran organizations need increased technical support

Funding needed for veteran housing projects

Establish veteran-specific stream within the National Housing Strategy

Veteran organizations need funding to cover operation costs

# Transition from military to civilian life



## Problem



## Solution



## Considerations

Lack of military cultural competency leads to **negative outcomes**

Scale up existing training programs

**Incentivize** training and consider unique needs of **subgroups**

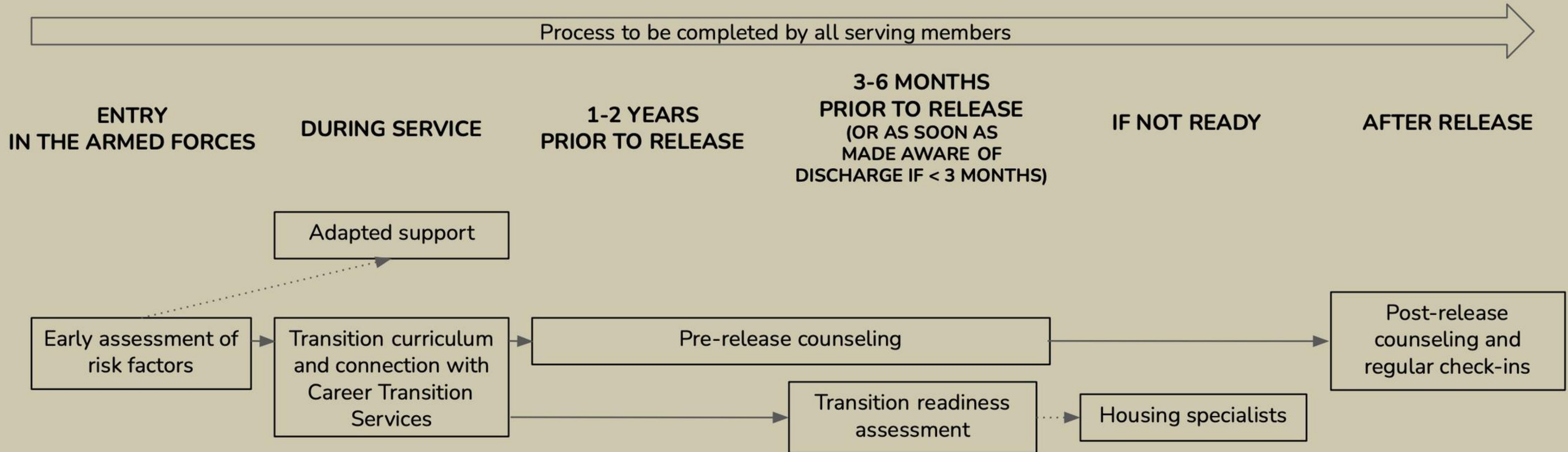
Some veterans come out of the military **ill-equipped to reintegrate into civilian life**

Consolidate and enhance existing **transition programs**

Improve **collaboration**, build **capacity** and consider unique needs of **subgroups**



# Transition from military to civilian life





# What you can do

- Develop military cultural competency
- Understand and meet the specific needs of subgroups of the veteran population
- Support veterans to register to VAC
- Implement HIFIS
- Advocacy

# Full report



<https://www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/policy-lab-2023/veteran-homelessness>

# Executive Summary





# Contact information

Email:

[sandrine.desforges@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:sandrine.desforges@mail.mcgill.ca)  
[sandrinedesforges@icloud.com](mailto:sandrinedesforges@icloud.com)

LinkedIn:

[www.linkedin.com/in/sandrine-  
desforges](http://www.linkedin.com/in/sandrine-desforges)

A person in a military uniform is shown from the chest up. The uniform is olive green and features several Canadian flags on the sleeves. The person's face is partially visible at the top of the frame. The background is dark and out of focus.

**THANK YOU**