

**Royal Canadian Legion  
Dominion Command  
Homeless Veterans Workshop**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Homeless Veterans program, was initiated in Ontario Command, in November, 2009 and was given the name Operation: Leave the Streets Behind, by Comrade Ed Pigeau, Provincial President of the day. Korean Veteran, Joe Sweeney approached Ontario Command with the idea of hosting a Homeless Veterans Remembrance Service and hence the beginning of the program, with the first ever service being held at Scott Mission in Toronto. The object of the program is of course is to end Homelessness among our Veteran population, throughout Canada.

Veterans Affairs Canada has been a partner since day one and have been instrumental in providing assistance on an individual basis, to each qualified Veteran. Participation in the program is not mandatory, but who wouldn't want to step to the plate and assist Homeless Veterans, to Leave the Streets Behind.

The Legion, National convention in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2012, saw the introduction of the national program, Leave the Streets Behind by, Dominion President Comrade Pat Varga.

**GUIDELINES**

**LEAVE THE STREETS BEHIND  
HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM GUIDELINES  
FOR PROVINCIAL COMMANDS AND LEGION BRANCHES**

The following guidelines are to assist Provincial Commands and Legion Branches to establish a Homeless Veterans program in their respective areas. They are not steadfast or mandatory but are meant to provide assistance to establishing a Homeless Veterans program.

**Veterans Services and Seniors/Homeless Veterans Committee**

Since the beginning of the program there has been no stipulation to the makeup of the VSS or Homeless Veterans Committee(s). Is the Homeless Veterans Committee part of the VSS Committee or is it a separate entity? The decision is that of Provincial Commands, but there must be consistency throughout the Districts, Zones and Branches as they will continue to implement the program.

**DEFINITIONS**

Understanding the types of Homelessness is a must and can determine how each case will be handled.

**Absolute Homelessness**

Absolute Homelessness is defined where an individual or family has no permanent housing and is staying in temporary shelter. The temporary shelter could be doorways, empty buildings, abandoned vehicles, parks or bench common areas.

### **Near Homelessness**

An individual or family are on the brink of losing their present living quarters, due to lack of payment of rent, heat and hydro, etc.

### **At Risk Homeless**

An individual who is dependent on others for housing, who is couch surfing, and whose personal or economic situation has changed.

### **NOTE**

Keep in mind that Female Veterans have been identified in the Homeless Veterans program.

### **GETTING STARTED**

Appoint a Committee Chairperson and establish a committee. Develop Terms of Reference for the committee and determine who will be responsible for the various aspects of the program. Larger communities may require additional committee members to cover the various shelters. Branches may wish to appoint a committee locally, Zones may wish to include all Branch Veterans Services chairpersons.

Keeping statistics is critical as they will give credibility to future reports and updates to various organizations, such as VAC and other government agencies, and itemize the assistance provided.

Identify and create partnerships with various Missions and Shelters, Police Services at all levels, EMS, VAC and create a referral to where these associations can make contact with the local VSS Committee or Command office to engage in a solution or assistance for a Homeless Veteran.

Develop literature for the program and distribute to various partners. *Tri-fold Pamphlets are available from Dominion Command, please send requests to veteranservices@legion.ca.* It is extremely beneficial to develop an Intake document to be forwarded to a contact locally or the Command office for distribution.

It is essential that VAC be a partner in your program. Once you have received documentation, provide the local VAC office with a copy and ensure the Veteran becomes a client and they look after any paperwork for benefits to which they may be eligible to receive. Have a meeting with the local offices or the Command can meet with the Regional Director General to ensure VAC is on board with the program.

It would be beneficial to establish contact with the municipality and invite the Homeless committee and their associates to a meet and greet providing refreshments.

*NOTE:* Provincial Governments are mandating that Municipalities establish a **Homeless**

*By Name list that would include Veterans. Normally they would also establish a Referral Form to include various agencies in the surrounding area. It is extremely important to have the Legion included on the referral list and to be contacted when a Homeless Veteran is identified. The Legion in return should have their Intake document completed or use the referral form. Either way it is still mandatory to verify the service of the Veteran through Dominion Command. It is also a requirement to provide a Legion contact for the municipality, to have an Intake document provided for statistical purposes and immediate assistance for the Veteran.*

## **FUNDING**

Dominion Command approved the use of Poppy Funds in 2010, thus eliminating the necessity for Provincial Commands or Branches to use funds from the General Account to support the Homeless Program. Branches can donate to a Homeless Veterans Fund created at the Command level (if applicable) and these funds can be used to support the program and pay necessary expenses for meetings and support being given to the Veterans. Reference Poppy Manual, page 23, Section 402 (v) iii. Branches can also use funds locally to assist the Veteran.

Many Branches have noted there are no Homeless Veterans in their communities; this does not mean that they cannot donate to the Provincial Command Homeless Veterans Fund to support the program. Many Branches have excess funds in their Poppy accounts and this is an ideal way to use them, when it is least expected a Veteran could find themselves in a vulnerable situation. Commands and Branches can also donate to the Dominion Command National Foundation, whereby funds could be used to assist other Commands who are short on funding for this program.

## **PAPERWORK**

A simple one-page Intake document that provides his/her name, contact information for the Shelter and their Case Workers name can be created and used when the Veteran applies for assistance. Please put the document on your respective Command letterhead. (sample available upon request) Also noted and the most important is the Service Number, we cannot emphasize the necessity for this information. Before any assistance is provided it is **mandatory to verify the Service of the Veteran, this can be done through Dominion Command by sending the name, date of birth and Service Number if available, of the Veteran to Dominion Command, email [veteransservices@legion.ca](mailto:veteransservices@legion.ca) or phone toll free 1-877-534-4666, verification can be completed in 24 to 48 hrs.** The verification is mandatory, as there are many people coming forward claiming they are Veterans and seeking assistance through the Homeless program. Completing this form will also allow for a paper trail and will avoid duplication. In the past, we have found that people have attempted to use the Homeless fund for travel across Canada indicating they are Homeless and asking Branches for funds for travel, noting they have to get to another city or town to visit a sick family member. A paper trail will avoid such duplication.

## **PROVIDING ASSISTANCE**

Once verification is complete, the need of the Veteran should be first and foremost. What are the immediate needs? Gift cards purchased locally can provide food, clothing etc.

**Never give cash or a cheque to an applicant!** Commands and Branches can purchase gift cards, for example from Tim Hortons, McDonald's, Walmart or local grocery stores. In doing so, the Veteran is limited to what he/she can purchase with the card and this eliminates alcohol etc.

Providing assistance for new accommodation, in the manner of first and last month's rent, caution must be taken to ensure that the Veteran can sustain the costs of the apartment. Before committing to any funds request a copy of the Lease Agreement and a financial update from the Veteran to ensure they can afford the unit. **Make cheques payable to the Landlord and send directly to them, and DO NOT put the Veterans name on the cheque.**

If possible, provide an apartment kit or something to welcome the Veteran to their new home. A set of dinnerware, cutlery, coffee mugs, cups and saucers, drinking glasses, dish soap, dish clothes, and the list goes on. Back Packs can also be used to encourage Homeless Veterans to seek the assistance they require to Leave the Streets Behind. These backpacks can be given to VAC to assist in encouraging the more cautious Veterans to come forward.

#### **Sample Apartment Kit may contain:**

Salt/pepper, Shower curtain + rings, 8 piece bed in a bag, Pillows, Afghan, Tide, Pot/pan set, Garbage & compost bags, Plastic container set, Spatula, large spoon, flipper set(5 pieces), Cutlery set, Dishes, coffee mugs, Drinking glasses, Dish towels, Wash cloths, Dish soap, all-purpose cleaner and wipes, Alarm clock, Paring knife, Carrot/veggie peeler, Tongs, Toilet paper, Paper towel, Bath towel set, Electric kettle, Toaster, Hangers, Coffee/hot chocolate packs, Instant oatmeal

#### **Sample Comfort Bag (Backpack) may contain:**

Ground matt, 2 in 1 shampoo, Sun screen, Deodorant, Tooth brush/paste, Floss, Bar of soap and holder Wash cloth, Nail cutter set, Passport pouch, Chap stick, Hand/foot warmers, 2 pairs of socks, T- shirt, Candies, Instant oatmeal, Coffee/hot chocolate, Small chocolate bar, Can of nuts, Winter socks, First aid kit, Hat/mitt/scarf, Baseball hat, Pen & paper, Hand wipes, Combs/hair brush, Hand cream

**Back Packs can be assembled for both male and female Veterans.**

### **Community Assistance**

Once you let the community know that the Homeless Veterans program exists, they will come forward with assistance and will make inquiries as to what is needed. You may be over whelmed by the assistance that various community groups and organizations will bring forward. Be sure to let the community know what the Legion is doing to support the program and assistance being given to the Homeless Veterans in your area.

### **Municipal Point in Time Counts**

October, 2021 saw municipalities across the country complete Point in Time Counts where they would interview Homeless individuals on the streets over a 24 hour time period. One question asked is "Did you serve in the Canadian Military?". Many municipalities reported the identification of Homeless Veterans and this is where the local Branches can assist to meet the needs of the Veteran.

As previously noted the information provided is a Guide only, and from this Legion Commands and Branches can develop their own Homeless Veterans program.

If you have questions or require clarification and further information, please contact Comrade Carolyn Hughes, Coordinator, VSS Committee, Dominion Command, [chughes@legion.ca](mailto:chughes@legion.ca) or Comrade Dave Gordon, National Homeless Representative, [gordon\\_214@sympatico.ca](mailto:gordon_214@sympatico.ca).

## **ACTION TO PREVENT AND ERADICATE VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS**

The Dominion Command VSS Committee and DEC approved the Action Plan to Prevent and Eradicate Veteran's Homelessness document that was written by Comrade John Mahon and members of the VSS Committee in 2020. The Plan outlines the action that will be taken by the Legion for the next five years. It should be noted as of writing this presentation Veterans Affairs Canada, has yet to produce or publish a Homeless Veterans Strategy. To their credit they did produce a document "Homeless Veterans Case Management" in 2017 that was presented to the RCL Veterans Homelessness Advisory Committee in March of that year.

The following are the Objectives from this document that can be found in its entirety on the Legion website [www.legion.ca](http://www.legion.ca). Each objective is followed by a "Key Result Area" which provides steps that can be taken by all to assist in eliminating Veteran Homelessness.

### **2.6 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULT AREAS**

- **Strategic Objective #1: Strong and visible leadership.**
  - Strong leadership is required at all levels of the Royal Canadian Legion Commands and Branches in order to ensure the passion, talent, energy and resources brought by all stakeholders are efficiently and effectively resourced and brought to bear on the problem of Veteran homelessness. While there are excellent relations that already exist between our government and non-governmental partners, much more can be done to enhance coordination and ensure information and ideas are rapidly shared to leverage available resources and address identified gaps in services. This will facilitate faster implementation, so that results can be achieved without unnecessary delay.



#### **Key Result Areas:**

- Educate the public and our service delivery partners on the scope, causes and costs of Veteran homelessness, and ensure that Veterans issues are understood as part of the wider response to homelessness;
- Increase collaboration at the National, Provincial and Branch levels with established partners and stakeholders as well as other homeless organizations, to better define roles, share information and knowledge, and develop strong and enduring processes to assist homeless Veterans;
- Re-establish the Royal Canadian Legion Veterans' Homelessness Advisory Committee with the previously established stakeholders; and
- Engage with Veteran stakeholders on local initiatives.

- Guidelines for establishing a Homeless Veterans program in each Command (province) have been developed and distributed to Commands

- **Strategic Objective #2: Increase knowledge about Veterans' Homelessness.**

- Over the past few years, information has emerged about the Homeless Veteran population. However, to more effectively combat this issue, a more accurate portrait of this population is needed. The availability of data on the situation of Homeless Veterans, evidence on the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken, and knowledge of the factors that lead to homelessness among Veterans are key to addressing this issue. Knowing or being able to predict the causes of Veteran homelessness improves the odds of being able to design effective interventions. The most effective initiatives for ending homelessness have been proven to be evidence-based. These rely on timely and accurate data in order to measure their effectiveness and success, and to enable the ability required to rapidly adapt these initiatives if required.



**Key Result Areas:**

- Increase education and collaboration with partners at the Branch, Provincial Command, OSI Special Section and Dominion Command to identify and share best practices to address the issue;
- Establish metrics to ensure effective services and supports are provided;
- Work with CIMVHR research academics and others to identify gaps in research and help determine the factors that lead to Veteran homelessness; and
- Increase our activities to ensure that the Royal Canadian Legion is the recognized advocate for Homeless Veterans at the National, Provincial and Branch levels.

**Note:** Statistics must be collected, shared and distributed on a regular and timely manner.

- **Strategic Objective #3: Strengthen our capacity to identify and connect with Homeless Veterans.**

- It is critical that the Royal Canadian Legion effectively reaches out and identifies Veterans who are homeless so that support and services can be provided. However, identification can be challenging, given the very nature of what it means to live on the streets and many Homeless Veterans are very likely to be disengaged, isolated and mistrustful. Conventional means of connecting such by phone or email are many times non-effective as many have no fixed address and lack access to the required technology. Even verification of military service can sometimes be a long process, as many Veterans may be missing identification documentation or forgotten details such as their military service number. Accordingly, many do not self-identify to the Service Bureaus and, for those that do, establishing and maintaining contact is difficult. Therefore, a more proactive approach at the Provincial and Branch levels is required whereby Service Officers

and local community partner organizations work collaboratively to better find, identify, track and engage Homeless Veterans.

 **Key Result Areas:**

- Increase collaboration, communication and efficiency of outreach initiatives by all stakeholders at the Provincial and Branch levels;
- Improve efficiency and timeliness of process of verification of military service; and
- Study other processes to more effectively identify and assist Homeless Veterans.
- Share findings and stats with all organizations involved

• **Strategic Objective #4: Strengthen our capacity to provide effective crisis response.**

- The Royal Canadian Legion will assist Veterans who are homeless by providing access to the services and support that address their needs. This will help to either prevent them from becoming homeless, or if they are, give them the necessary support to facilitate their entry into longer-term programs that ultimately lead to a more stable and secure lifestyle.

 **Key Result Areas:**

- Advocate ways to expand the current eligibility criteria for VAC's programs and services to help enable homeless Veterans to get the help they need; and
- Collaborate with other government departments and stakeholder organizations on initiatives that will provide evidence and best practices to expand services and programs that help Veterans who are homeless or in crisis.
- Liaison with Transition Centres.

• **Strategic Objective #5: Increase access to stable and affordable housing for Veterans.**

- In addition to needing clinical supports to deal with their addictions and physical/mental health problems, most Homeless Veterans and those in crisis need access to a stable and affordable housing. Even with social and financial assistance provided from other sources, such as provincial or municipal programs and services, the amount of funding provided is often insufficient to maintain a very basic lifestyle, as a large percentage of income is dedicated to housing with little remaining for other necessities such as food, clothing or transportation.

 **Key Result Areas:**

- Provide financial assistance and support to Veterans who are homeless; and

- Provide financial assistance to organizations that expand the supply of affordable, permanent housing for Veterans.
  - Seek funding support from the National Legion Foundation.
- **Strategic Objective #6: Facilitate the successful military to civilian transition and inspire Veterans to achieve their optimal well-being.**
    - Research has shown that Homeless Veterans often report poor transition and this was a major factor in the path that led them to homelessness. Hence, it is logical that enhancing the transition experience will reduce the factors and circumstances that lead to homelessness in the first instance. A positive transition experience helps ensure stable employment/sufficient income that provides the necessities of life for Veterans and their families. An improved military to civilian transition would include an efficient and seamless transition of medical treatment information and supports from the military medical system to the provincial system, and linkages to community support systems for the Veteran and family, including mental health and/or additional supports. Ultimately, a successful transition maintains or enhances the well-being of Veterans and families, reducing or eliminating risk factors for homelessness and poor quality of life and helps inspire Veterans to affect positive changes in their own lives.



**Key Result Areas:**

- Optimize support to Veterans' families through Poppy Funds and local, Legion and non-Legion, financial resources; and
  - Re-establish the Royal Canadian Legion Veterans' Homelessness Advisory Committee with the previously established stakeholders.
- **Strategic Objective #7: Expand and enhance initiatives to rapidly identify and better support Veterans who come into contact with the criminal justice system.**
    - Ensure assistance is available to all Veterans who come into contact with the criminal justice system; and
    - Ensure all incarcerated Veterans are afforded necessary treatment programs while in custody, and that suitable housing is available for them upon release.



**Key Result Areas:**

- Develop and implement a model, at the Branch level, for collaboration with local police services and other first responders to coordinate outreach and identification efforts and to facilitate Homeless Veterans' use of the Legion's services; and
- Enhance pre-release transition services for incarcerated Veterans to include access to safe and affordable housing.

**Note:** VAC has initiated pilot Criminal Justice programs in Nova Scotia and Alberta. Ontario Command is also working on development of a similar



program. It must also be noted that the responsibility for internal treatment programs while incarcerated has yet to be determined.

## **Quarterly Reports**

In January 2020, Provincial Commands were requested to complete a quarterly report and it essential to forward the reports in a timely manner to assist in providing statistics for future reports.

**NOTE:** When this program started there were no funds available. No funds have been made available from any level of government. The generosity of Branches, Ladies Auxiliaries and outside donations have been in excess of \$ 3.1 million disbursed to assist Homeless Veterans.

## **CONCLUSION**

Canada and the Royal Canadian Legion owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who willingly put their lives on the line to defend our freedom and values, and to help make our country what it is today. It is disheartening that in a nation as rich as Canada, men and women who have served their country now find themselves struggling to attain the very basic necessities of life – including a place they can call home. While progress has been made, more work needs to be done to reach out and support Homeless Veterans and those in crisis or at risk of homelessness.

One thing is certain: ***it is unacceptable for any Veteran to face Homelessness in Canada.***

The ultimate goal of “*Leave the Streets Behind*” is to prevent and eradicate Veteran Homelessness in Canada. While it may be naïve to think that there will never again be Canadian Veterans without a place to call home, the objectives outlined in this Action Plan will ensure that these situations are atypical. Should any Veteran find him or herself Homeless, the Royal Canadian Legion must ensure that the necessary support is in place to make the experience short-lived and non-recurring. To do less will mean we are failing to meet our organization’s Mission and Vision Statement.

## **One Homeless Veteran is one to many!**

Thank you for your attendance at this workshop.

For further information please contact Comrade Carolyn Hughes, [chughes@legion.ca](mailto:chughes@legion.ca).