

## VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

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### **ISSUE / QUESTION:**

- What is the Government of Canada doing to address veteran homelessness?
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### **SUGGESTED RESPONSE:**

- **On April 27, 2023, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and I announced \$79.1 million in funding for the Veteran Homelessness Program.**
- **The Program will provide \$72.9 million for rent supplements and wrap-around services, such as counselling and treatment for substance abuse. It will also provide \$6.2 million to support research on veteran homelessness.**
- **Eligible recipients, including veteran-serving organizations, can submit their funding proposal through an online portal on the Infrastructure Canada website until June 23, 2023.**
- **The Government of Canada is committed to ending chronic homelessness among veterans, and this new program is a significant step towards achieving that goal.**

## **BACKGROUND:**

Your mandate letter, published on December 16, 2021, included a plan to “Accelerate our Government’s commitment to end chronic homelessness among veterans through the Rapid Housing Initiative, a new rent supplement program, wrap around supports and a dedicated stream of funding for veterans within the National Housing Co-Investment Fund.”

### **Veteran Homelessness Program**

Budget 2021 and Budget 2022 announced a total of \$106.8 million over five years for Infrastructure Canada to launch a new Veteran Homelessness Program that will provide wrap-around services and rent supplements to veterans experiencing homelessness in partnership with community organizations. The program was announced on April 27, 2023 ([News Release](#)). The Call for Proposals opened on April 28, 2023, and will close on June 23, 2023.

As part of the National Housing Strategy suite of federal housing initiatives, the Veteran Homelessness Program will provide \$72.9 million through the Services and Supports Stream for rent supplements and “wrap-around” services such as counselling and treatment for substance use.

Additionally, \$6.2 million will be available through the Capacity Building Stream, to fund research on veteran homelessness and support capacity building. The Veteran Homelessness Program will provide ongoing and comprehensive services and supports to veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness over a five-year period, in order to maximize their chances of long-term success in being rehoused.

### **Veteran Homelessness Roundtables**

In March 2022, you co-hosted three virtual veteran homelessness roundtables with the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence. In total, 41 veteran and homelessness stakeholders participated, as well as veterans with lived experience of homelessness.

These roundtables gathered ideas on how the Government can lead efforts to end veteran homelessness, and were used to inform the new Veteran Homelessness Program announced in Budget 2022 and launched on April 27, 2023. Themes included the need to ensure: veteran housing choice; that wrap-around services are available in conjunction with affordable and safe housing; that health and medical services are integrated in supports for veterans; better data and data-driven approaches to veteran homelessness; increased awareness of available programs and services for veterans at risk or experiencing homelessness; and coordination across sectors, government departments, and orders of governments to prevent and reduce veteran homelessness.

## **Reaching Home**

Veterans experiencing homelessness have access to programming for homeless and at-risk individuals through Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy funding to communities.

In order to understand veterans experiencing homelessness, both coordinated Point-in-Time Counts held in 2016 and 2018 included a question on veteran status as one of the core questions being asked in the counts. With this data, resources can be targeted more effectively at the local level.

Further, the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System, software used by service providers across the country, includes indicators to identify veterans in order to refer them to services provided by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

On September 23, 2020, the Speech from the Throne committed to building on the work of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) by focusing on “entirely eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada”, including among veterans.

## **Beyond Reaching Home, other initiatives that support veterans**

Through VAC, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is responsible for a number of other initiatives that support veterans as well as the organizations who serve them.

Budget 2021 announced \$140 million over five years starting in 2021-22, and \$6 million ongoing, for a program that would cover the mental health care costs of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive, or anxiety disorders while their disability benefit application is being processed.

Other examples of VAC programming include:

- The [Veterans Emergency Fund](#), which provides prompt financial support to veterans, their families and survivors who are facing an unforeseen financial emergency that is threatening their health and well-being;
- Financial assistance available to eligible veterans through the [War Veterans Allowance](#), the [Assistance Fund](#), and [Treatment benefits](#);
- Educational and employment assistance and mental health supports, as well as programs that care for veterans with disabilities;
- The [VAC Assistance Service](#), which provides free, short-term psychological support with a mental health professional to veterans, their families, and their caregivers for difficulties affecting their well-being.

Not-for-profit organizations, such as Veterans Emergency Transition Services (VETS) Canada, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund and the Canadian Forces Personnel Assistance Fund, also provide veterans in crisis with access to emergency funds.

## **London, Ontario's achievement of functional zero on veteran homelessness**

The community of London, Ontario is the first in Canada to functionally end veteran homelessness, meaning the number of veterans experiencing homelessness is less than or equal to the number of veterans a community has proven it can house in a given month.

Between March and August 2020, London reduced the number of veterans experiencing homelessness by over 57%. Leveraging community-level data and working in collaboration with organizations serving veterans, the local homeless-serving system strategically targeted resources on homeless veterans.

Through Reaching Home, the Government has provided investments to implement Coordinated Access and a unique identifier list (or By-Name List), a comprehensive real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in a community. Through a combination of Reaching Home funding and supports provided by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), London was the first community in Canada to achieve a Quality By-Name List for veterans as part of CAEH's Built for Zero Canada initiative.

In addition, through the support of CAEH, in April 2023, the community of St. Thomas-Elgin, Ontario announced that it was the second community in Canada to achieve functional zero veteran homelessness.

### **Data on Veteran Homelessness**

- In 2020, an estimated 1.5% of emergency shelter users were veterans (approximately 1,370 individuals). This is consistent with the estimated overall proportion of veterans in Canada according to the 2021 VAC counts (1.7%). It is believed that these results are underestimated given that they are based on veterans who self-identify; and exclude veterans who do not access the shelter system. As a result, it is generally estimated there are about 2,500 veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Results from the 2018 Coordinated Point-in-Time Count show that in the 61 participating communities, approximately 5% of respondents indicated that they were a veteran of either the Canadian Armed Forces or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.