

Taking action for our Veterans

Dear editor:

Our Government will always stand up for our Veterans, and together with all Canadians, we will never forget their service and sacrifice. Since first being elected in 2006, spending has been going up, while at the same time the Veterans population has been declining.

We have taken concrete action to improve the quality of life of Veterans and their families. For example, we have delivered improved benefits and additional financial assistance for seriously injured Veterans for life, announced new job training support and priority job placement for Veterans as they transition into civilian life, opened 14 Operational Stress Injury Clinics and significantly enhanced long-term disability benefits for Canadian Forces members. These long-term investments into the welfare of our Veterans means that the programs and services will be operating for as long as our Veterans need them.

Since I was humbled to become Canada's Minister of Veteran Affairs, I have met and listened to countless heroic Veterans who put their country first. My pledge is simple: provide the very best care and improve benefits and supports. I have heard from many Veterans who urged the Government to review the New Veterans Charter (NVC). Only months into my Ministry, I personally called for a comprehensive review of the NVC. Like so many others, I wanted to know if there were any gaps in the benefits and services available for Veterans and their families. When the committee issued their final report, our Government moved forward to implement the measures that could be implemented quickly, such as more than doubling the number of counselling sessions for Veterans and their families, ensuring that Canadian Armed Forces personnel are not medically released until they are in a stable medical condition, and that more healthcare professionals are in place to provide service post-release.

Veterans also told me that additional mental health support is needed. I was proud to take action on that front, to build on our record, by investing significant funding in a comprehensive mental health strategy that will open 8 new front-line mental health clinics, open 7 family resource centres to medically releasing Veterans and their families, along with significant new investments for world class research. Our Government's investment is enhancing services from coast to coast ? in the communities of Halifax, Pembroke, Brockville, Chicoutimi, Kelowna, St. John's, Victoria and Montreal.

We are acting on the advice of Veterans by ensuring fewer forms, phone calls and steps are taken to access the benefits they need. We make no apologies for reducing the bureaucratic footprint in our effort to reduce paperwork, to guarantee Veterans have their money in their pockets sooner and to ensure investments are moved to the front-line.

I am seized with the importance of caring for our Veterans and their families ? to pay homage to the very people who fought for our freedom and defend our democracy and security. We will leave no stone unturned as we continue to take action to improve the lives of our Veterans and their families.

Julian Fantino, PC., MP

Minister of Veterans Affairs