

# HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia Nunavut Command  
Veterans Outreach Program**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Mr. Bill Horne (Chairman)  
Mr. Ben Jessome (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr. Chuck Porter  
Mr. Hugh MacKay  
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo  
Hon. Alfie MacLeod  
Ms. Karla MacFarlane  
Hon. David Wilson  
Ms. Tammy Martin

[Mr. Tim Halman replaced Hon. Alfie MacLeod]  
[Ms. Barbara Adams replaced Ms. Karla MacFarlane]

### In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia Nunavut Command

Mr. Steve Wessel, Chairman, Veterans Outreach Committee  
Ms. Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte, Executive Director



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2017**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

2:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Bill Horne

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could I have your attention please? Would everyone take their seat, please? I would like to welcome everybody who is here today for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I would like to remind everyone that the washrooms are outside to the left. If we need to evacuate, we will go to the Granville Street entrance, down the stairs, out the door, and up to Parade Square. Have your phones turned off or on vibrate, please.

This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I would like to ask the members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like you to begin your presentation. We will probably go to about 3:45 p.m., and then we have some correspondence we need to discuss.

MR. STEVE WESSEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to appear before you and your committee today. My remarks will be fairly short, but I'm sure that there will be enough questions afterwards that both Valerie and I will field. We are pleased to present a brief overview of the Royal Canadian Legion itself and in particular Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command's Veterans Outreach Program.

The mission statement of the Royal Canadian Legion is to “. . . serve Veterans . . . and their families, to promote Remembrance, and to serve our communities and our country.” Formally founded in 1926 with more than 275,000 members in over 1,400 branches, the Royal Canadian Legion reaches across our vast country and abroad and connects us to our past, our present, and our future. Our members care deeply about supporting the men and the women who serve and have served this country and strive to make a difference.

The Legion is Canada’s largest veteran and community service organization. Our membership includes currently serving and retired Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police members as well as the mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, sons and daughters, and grandchildren of our veterans. Each of these individuals is impacted by the care our veterans receive and the issues affecting them.

The Legion connects, builds relationships, and shares resources with like-minded veterans organizations and collaborates with key stakeholders to identify challenges and advocates for change. Through the generosity of fellow Canadians, funds raised during our annual poppy campaign are held in trust at each level of our organization - local branches, provincial and territorial commands, and at the Dominion Command level - and are used solely to provide assistance to veterans of all ages and their families and to foster the tradition of remembrance.

The Royal Canadian Legion Service Bureau Network works on behalf of veterans and their dependants to ensure they receive the benefits they deserve. Professional Command Service Officers extend assistance, information, and representation at all stages of the disability claim process, free of charge to all veterans whether they are a Legion member or not.

Under its Benevolent Fund, Nova Scotia Nunavut Command provides immediate emergency financial assistance to still serving and no longer serving CAF and RCMP members who are in financial distress. Also operated under the Benevolent Fund is our Veterans Outreach Program. Nova Scotia Nunavut Command has a history of a progressive and innovative approach to delivering transition and support programs to veterans and their families dealing with moral and mental health injuries.

We were first to deliver the Veterans Transition Program outside of British Columbia to veterans in Nova Scotia experiencing difficulty transitioning to civilian life. In fact, we were instrumental in having the VTN adopted as a service provider with Veterans Affairs Canada so that now veterans across the country may access this life-changing program.

We have delivered further transition support programs, such as Aftershock and the trauma relapse prevention program, through our partner, Dr. John Whelan, and are committed to the delivery of further programming in this field as new strategies are developed.

We sponsor participation in programs of a national scope, such as Project Healing Waters, Wounded Warriors Weekend, and Outward Bound. We have developed a local program called Healing on the Fly, whereby veterans meet to tie fishing flies. Many impromptu fishing expeditions have arisen from Healing on the Fly, which is in itself remarkable when you consider the courage it takes for some, who are mostly otherwise withdrawn from society. Plans are underway to arrange an annual fishing trip for Healing on the Fly within Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia Nunavut Command continues to support the success of peer support groups, such as Porchlight and both the veteran and family divisions of the Operational Stress Injury Social Support Program. For the last three years, we have sponsored an OSISS weekend retreat that promotes self care and teaches coping strategies for family members of those living with the effects of operational stress injuries.

Nova Scotia Nunavut Command is a founding partner of Paws Fur Thought, a program that pairs service dogs with veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder. Our advocacy continues to have post-traumatic stress disorder service dogs available to all who are in need, as a benefit under Veterans Affairs Canada.

Nova Scotia Nunavut Command brought the first and only Homeless Veterans Forum to Nova Scotia and has trained outreach workers in mental health first aid. Nova Scotia Nunavut Command through its Veterans Outreach Program has played an integral role from its inception in a working group committed to the creation and development in Nova Scotia of the Veterans Memorial Medical Centre.

In other areas Nova Scotia Nunavut Command sits on the Nova Scotia Group of IX committee, is represented on the Camp Hill veterans council, and participates in the Veterans Affairs Canada Outreach and Visitation Program, while our branches regularly see to the visitation and comfort of veterans in every veterans hospital unit and wing within our provincial jurisdiction. Through the office of our executive director, we continue to coordinate with Veterans Affairs Canada on the Integrated Personnel Support Centre, the Military Family Resource Centres, Support Our Troops, the various arms of the Military Family Fund, and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services to deliver support to veterans and their families.

We coordinate on an as-required basis with Commissionaires Nova Scotia, the Society of Atlantic Heroes, the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia, Rally Point Retreat, the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, VETS Canada, and all social service agencies within Nova Scotia.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, the Articles of Faith of the Royal Canadian Legion state, in part: “THAT THOSE WHO DIED in the service of the nation will always be remembered together with their widows and widowers. THAT THOSE WHO SURVIVE and need our aid may be assured of reasonable and adequate assistance.”

Honouring our veterans is the Legion's duty. Our veterans served to protect our rights and freedoms and the Royal Canadian Legion remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring they receive the care and supports they deserve and that their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

We thank you for the ability to deliver this short presentation and we will try to answer any questions with regard to our programs that the committee may have.

I was noticing that your information that was sent out previous said to keep it to within five or 10 minutes. We probably could have gone a lot longer but we kept it to within the five minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's certainly a lot of issues and discussion points that can be picked out from your presentation so I thank you for that. It's time to take questions. Mr. Porter.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and through you to the witnesses, thanks for being here. It was great to have a chat, Mr. Wessel, for the few minutes that we had prior to the meeting starting, about a variety of different things.

I guess I would start by saying I know the Legion very well, given that I am a long-time member of Branch 9 in Windsor, which I shared with you, and have had numerous members of my family and my wife's family and so on very active in the military and who have gone through some things. I think of one, her brother - my brother-in-law - who for 25 years did his share of things in places around the world that I'm sure he would never want anyone to do again. It wasn't easy.

It's good to have programs and organizations and people out there like yourselves and the Legion that support these, whether they are members or not members - that was a key part that I picked up in your speech. I didn't take any notes but it stuck with me so I just wanted to mention it, it's an important piece that you continue to do that and that outreach is going to be vital for a long time to come, I think.

When we talk about all those things, it all takes money, we all know that, and raising money. We talked a bit about how difficult it has become in branches also, not only through membership but other things and how we used to support over the years many things, from sports teams - I know in Windsor they used to purchase the vehicle for the VON at one point, every so many years. Money was a little easier to come by. Bingos were alive and thriving and good money-makers, and it becomes more and more of a challenge to make that.

You are doing a lot, from what you've described in your short presentation, by way of command. Where is the funding coming from to be able to do that? I realize some of the membership dollars obviously make up, you take a portion of that in the command but where is the rest? How does that all break down? Can you speak to that a bit?

MR. WESSEL: Yes. We receive a lot of our funding obviously through the annual poppy drive every year. Although those monies that are given generously by the Canadian public are held in trust, as I said, at the various levels, and there is a definite set of rules and regulations as to how they can and cannot be used.

We're within very strict boundaries as to how we can use those funds and we report to the public as to how those funds are used. Those are our requirements with regard to our Poppy Fund. But as I said, a lot of what we pay for and support is supported through our Benevolent Fund, which is the main drive for our funding for our Veterans Outreach Program because it's a registered charity and we can offer receipts through our Benevolent Fund.

Our funds are limited, obviously. We find ourselves scratching our heads, wondering where we're going to come up with funds for specific programs. We're sort of always looking for support from the federal and provincial and municipal levels to help with these, as we are finding right now with the medical centre that we're discussing and has been in the news and has been underway now for what, Valerie, a year and a half, two years or more now? Valerie sits on that committee with regard to the medical centre. She can speak more fluently about that program in itself, if you would like to hear from her on that, but with regard to finances, that's where it comes from, it's our poppy drive.

MR. PORTER: Maybe before we move on to the section of it, what would the budget look like? What kind of numbers annually for Nova Scotia Nunavut Command, with all that you're doing - the operation, et cetera - what kind of budget are we looking at?

MR. WESSEL: For our Veterans Outreach program?

MR. PORTER: No, in general. You can break it down if you like. I'm kind of curious about that.

[2:15 p.m.]

MR. WESSEL: Well, how we run our business I guess is public knowledge, but with regard to our Veterans Outreach program, we're looking in the \$45,000 to \$50,000 a year range just to operate our programs and keep them going.

If we want to do anything special, if we want to develop this Healing on the Fly in various locations across Nova Scotia - we want to have more than one location. We want to have three, four, or five different locations where we can host these. If that's the case, we're going to be looking at a possible fishing trip obviously for these guys and women. That's going to come into a few dollars extra.

Our Veterans Outreach budget has increased dramatically over the years. I think this is about our highest one right now. Val, you can correct me if I'm wrong. This is about our highest budget right now.

Although in previous years when we were dealing with the VTN, the Veterans Transition Network, we were spending upwards of \$50,000 or \$60,000 per program for one of those, and we hosted two in one year at one point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte.

MS. VALERIE MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Thank you. Just to add to that, I think we should perhaps clarify that some of the programs that Steve has mentioned in our presentation would be model programs that we set up that our branches then duplicate at their level in various communities, or jurisdiction. Healing on the Fly - we may have established that in the Halifax-Dartmouth area as a model for our branches to copy, for instance in Sydney, in Bridgewater, or in Yarmouth.

So, far more work is being done than just what we presented to you here today. It's being done at the branch level and at the community level. When we talk about the dedication of finances to this, it's far more reaching than just what we have presented to you today as to what we spearhead at the command level.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: That segues kind of nicely into my question. I guess we would all have a different definition of what outreach is. I'm kind of curious about some of the broader items, I guess, that would be involved that may not get the light of day on a regular basis or things that, like you said, would be focused on from a command perspective. Just kind of the broader definition and activity that you do with respect to outreach activity, please and thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Who would you like to speak to that?

MR. JESSOME: Either witness, please and thank you, or both.

MR. WESSEL: It's a tough question really. At our command level - you have to understand the way our organization works, I guess. Obviously, we have our branches, and they're all broken up into different zones of our province. The zones would be combined into a district, and then we have our command headquarters.

As Val has said, we spearhead these programs. We develop these programs. We institute these programs, and we try to initiate these programs as far-reaching as we can, get as many branches as we can involved.



We are also being informed of various programs with regard to veterans that are occurring within the local areas. The branches themselves will come to us and say, we developed this little program, or we are wanting to develop this little program within our area and thought it might be something that you guys might be interested in. There are the local branches that are developing their own because they have their own veteran population within that community. They are actively helping veterans, whether it just be helping them with their day-to-day finances in the fact that they may need help with oil for the winter or something like that. They would make application. Things like that can be helped through our Poppy Fund.

Val could speak to the actual totals, but our Poppy Fund generates quite a bit of money throughout this province. The amount of money that is spent through that Poppy Fund that is directed back towards veterans and their dependants and families is a figure that I wouldn't want to guess, but I think, Val, if I put you on the spot and ask you to come up with that figure - it's a substantial sum of money.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I certainly agree with you that it is substantial. I would like to address your question on outreach. Certainly, by its very nature, the purpose of the Royal Canadian Legion is veteran outreach and outreach to families. We have identified today very specific programs under the umbrella of our Veterans Outreach Committee, but our outreach extends beyond that to every part of our operation. We do operate a service bureau with service officers at every level within the organization. That is at branch level, and certainly through our command level.

As Mr. Wessel described, that assistance offered to veterans and their families is assistance in applying for benefits and entitlements straight through to veterans review and appeal. That's a whole other area of outreach that we could discuss and poppy trust funds raised at our level of the organization support that service bureau and its valuable work. We basically do the same work as case managers of Veterans Affairs, but we do it without any government funding whatsoever - provincially or federally. A veteran, of course, doesn't need to be a member of the Royal Canadian Legion to receive that type of assistance, nor do the families. So that's a level of outreach.

Other levels of outreach would be through our participation in professional development, Second Career Assistance Network programs through the health sector of the Integrated Personnel Support Centres, through the fact that we have a regular office at the IPSCs, which as you probably know, also house the Joint Personnel Support Units. The IPSC is the Integrated Personnel Support Unit, and the JPSU is actually the unit that people are posted to as they're transitioning out of the military. Our service officers and I spend quite a bit of time down at the IPSC. We work with SISIP and all the various financial arms of the Department of National Defence. Again, that's a whole other area of outreach.

It's difficult to describe the Royal Canadian Legion without that key word, "outreach" - it is what we do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you again for coming and giving us a bit of overview of what has been going on over the last year or so with the Legion. I look forward to your update - I think it's on a yearly basis. I've been a member of this committee for a number of years now - I think over 10 years. It has been a pleasure to work with many of your colleagues and yourselves for the last number of years.

I think the timing - and you've mentioned that around the last three years you sponsored some retreats and stuff, and some of the work you've done around PTSD and operational stress injuries is something that has really come to the forefront over the last couple of years compared to 10 or 12 years ago. I commend you for recognizing that and trying to play a part in trying to help those women and men who find themselves diagnosed with that, but more importantly, looking at not only supporting the veteran but supporting the family, which are often overlooked.

Challenges are in front of us getting support for mental health services for those who are injured, but the families are usually the ones that are left trying to deal with the fallout of such a diagnosis or injury that we see.

I just want a little bit of information on the retreat that you put on. Could you maybe give us a number of families or individuals who have benefited from that program? Was that solely funded through the poppy campaign? Are you able to get access to some of the funding that Veterans Affairs Canada has allocated specifically for operational stress injuries and PTSD? I know there are a couple of questions in there.

MR. WESSEL: I'll start off. I know Val, being our executive director, she is our administrator and she has full control of the conversations that we have with these groups. That's why she can talk so much better about them than I.

We have been dealing with these programs for more than the last three years. The last three years we've dealt with the families themselves in these retreats. We have expended funds in previous years just through OSISS itself and its various programs, but found that they seem to be frittering away and we didn't have really good control over where they were going, so we've developed this program, this family retreat. Val has the information with regard to it, but I think it's around 20 or 25 people per year.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: It's actually about 10 per year.

MR. WESSEL: It's about 10 or so per year. I'm just going to step aside and let Val talk about that.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: When it comes to support for families who are living with the effects of mental and moral injuries, every 10 matter - every one more matters. As Comrade Wessel mentioned, up until about four years ago, the support coming from our command for families was delivered through the Military Family Resource Centres.

An examination of that, of course, showed that programs offered through the Military Family Resource Centres were extremely valuable to the military family community, but an area that was lacking was support on the family side of the OSISS program. I'm not sure if you understand what OSISS is or if you're aware of the program, but there is a family side and there is a peer member or veteran side.

On the family side, it's typically terribly underfunded. You have workers and the coordinators and the people in the flow positions in the social work field actually paying for reading materials out of their own pockets and trying to hold things together with bubble gum and sticky tape. When we became aware of this, we asked how we could help. In the first year they said, if we could just pull people together so they would know that they're not alone and that they could share experiences, share successes, share coping strategies, and they could actually realize that there are other people living the same kind of lives that they are - it would be a great start.

That's how we began, and in that first year we had about 25 that could attend. We recognized after that first year that there were other obstacles that may prevent family members in participating. So not only did we support the retreat, we provided financial assistance and facilitated things like daycare and other supports - travel expenses - to have people attend the retreat.

[2:30 p.m.]

The most recent retreat was held in October. As a member of the OSISS family support group and as a certified OSISS family peer supporter myself, I attended the second year. This most recent year was almost a copy of the second year - extremely valuable. I believe it's very difficult to explain the depth of the value of the support that is provided.

We are living in a world now whereby not all those serving or all those veterans live side by side and basically live in each other's backyards because they used to live on bases together, and the whole neighbourhood was going through the same thing. When there was a deployment, everybody was deployed so all the kids' daddies or mommies were away. That's not the case anymore, so the challenges faced have far-reaching effects into our schools and into our society, so these retreats are just absolutely invaluable.

They even teach some techniques to try to get some sleep - everything from practical things to strategies to deal with the injured veteran that's in the home. I hope that explained it without too much detail.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, do you have a follow-up?

MR. DAVID WILSON: I have all kinds. That's the key, you hit it right on. Usually people suffering and families suffering from this do it in isolation and often - well I don't have to explain it to you - part of how they deal with it is that they block out friends and family and that, so it's definitely beneficial. It's an area that I think doesn't get a lot of attention, so I encourage you to continue to do that and hopefully it can expand.

Just on the funding for that, any funding through Veterans Affairs Canada or are you able to tap into some of the funding?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Thank you, that is one point that I wanted to make and I kind of got lost there. We receive absolutely no funding from the Government of Canada. The only funding we receive from the Province of Nova Scotia is through the Legion Capital Assistance Program, which we are extremely thankful for and we think it's a wonderful program, but no other government funding is received by the Royal Canadian Legion.

The majority of funds utilized to deliver our Veterans Outreach Programs are contributed from branch poppy trust funds.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Adams.

MS. BARBARA ADAMS: I am the opposite of Mr. Wilson. This is my first time to one of the Veterans Affairs meetings, so I apologize for asking some things that others may know the answer to. You had mentioned the funding that you have was from the poppy drive, the Benevolent Fund, and then the Legion Capital Assistance Program. I'm just wondering if you know the dollar amounts for each of those three separate sources of funding for the Province of Nova Scotia.

MR. WESSEL: The LCAP - the Legion Capital Assistance Program - is set at \$100,000 per year and that can be shared at a \$10,000 maximum to any branch that wants to apply. The \$10,000 maximum is - if your project is \$5,600, you must willing to have at least half of the funding, so you're getting half of the fund from the LCAP.

With regard to our Benevolent Fund, our Benevolent Fund is actually supported through donations from branch Poppy Funds. That's where we have our immediate funding for any emergent situations that come up or any of our programs. We have branch assistance from their Poppy Funds to the command to support our Benevolent Fund, as well as to support our outreach program, as well as to support Paws Fur Thought. It's the individual branches that are driving our programs. They have been outstanding with regard to their financial support to our command to help us with our programs.

MS. ADAMS: I was just wondering how much the poppy campaign brings in. You mentioned that the outreach program costs around \$50,000 a year, so I'm just wondering how much the poppy campaign brings in for the province.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I'm sorry, our audit is not complete for 2017. We do make it public as to how much poppy trust funds were actually earned in any given year, but I'm not prepared to provide you with that figure at this time. I can provide it to the committee after the audit is completed at year end.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Halman.

MR. TIM HALMAN: My question is for Mr. Wessel or Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte. I'm quite fascinated by the Paws Fur Thought Program. The veterans that I've spoken to that have been paired with a service dog speak very highly of the program. How many veterans in Nova Scotia are paired with a service dog and what are some of the obstacles to expanding this program in pairing our veterans with a service dog?

MR. WESSEL: Presently through the organization, through Paws Fur Thought, we have over 80 dogs and handlers. Not necessarily all of those are in Nova Scotia. I don't have the exact figure for the amount that are actually here in Nova Scotia. Val might have that figure and she may add to it when I'm done.

That program, yes, is an extremely worthwhile program and we've been sort of out on our own and I don't mind saying that Nova Scotia has led the way with regard to the psychiatric service dog for our veterans suffering from PTSD.

We do have a resolution that has been passed at one of our Dominion Conventions where all of our legionnaires from across Canada get together at a Dominion Convention and pass resolutions that run the organization. We did agree quite a few years ago that we would be able to utilize Poppy Funds for the purchase of psychiatric service dogs for veterans suffering.

Although it has been sort of delayed across the country because of - we're waiting for standards. There were no general service board standards for service dogs for PTSD, but here in Nova Scotia we don't have a tendency to wait for things to happen - we go ahead and make them happen. We decided that we were going to make this program happen. We just could not afford the four- or five-year wait. That was at least four to six years ago that the resolution was passed and in those years, as I say, we have over 80 dogs in the field right now, where we wouldn't have if we were still sitting around waiting for these Canadian standards to be developed.

The program itself started off with one man and one dog - Star of Courage recipient Medric Cousineau, Air Force, Retired suffered greatly from PTSD and one of our local branches in Eastern Passage, as a matter of fact, helped him out with a service dog. It has developed from that point.

Val has a direct line of contact with Major Cousineau and his wife Jocelyn, and she may wish to add to whatever I have said here with regards to our Paws Fur Thought. Paws Fur Thought is basically administered through our office as a separate program.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: You asked what the largest obstacle is to moving this forward - not to finish your question for you, but to move this forward as being available to all veterans who could benefit with a PTSD service dog. That obstacle of course is having a PTSD service dog actually considered to be a medical benefit to veterans who qualify.

The efficacy study has been completed by Veterans Affairs, which I'm sure you're aware. There was a window of opportunity for public input into the results of that efficacy study. The conclusion of that efficacy study was yes, we agree this is a benefit. The other results from that efficacy study clearly established that there needs to be guidelines and qualifications for trainers, qualifying parameters for schools. It did all those things. That efficacy study identified that these are the things that need to be in place.

The latest from Veterans Affairs is that this is wonderful, we do see that it is a benefit, but we're not seeing the science. What we have done, in co-operation to a certain extent with Wounded Warriors Canada, is committed to providing funds to have a research study conducted to actually prove the science in that the proof will be that the dogs actually smell the cortisol that is released when the veteran is triggered. We're expecting that that's the result that the study will have because we've seen it and we work with it all the time.

We're doing this because we don't want to have any further delay in moving this life-changing and life-saving assistance available to veterans. Again, Nova Scotia Nunavut Command is at the forefront of veterans outreach in general, but certainly in the service dog world, we're ahead of every other command, which is provinces and territories in the country with this program. We look forward to being able to present the results of that scientific study to Veterans Affairs with the hopes that they'll say thank you Royal Canadian Legion for doing this and now we can move closer to making this a reality for all veterans who need it. Those are the biggest obstacles.

MR. WESSEL: Just to add to that, one other aspect that is a bit of a deterrent is the availability of trained dogs. We have an extreme difficulty in providing enough trained dogs to the veterans that are waiting. We have a much larger waiting list than we do active dogs and veterans in the field. There may be 80 or 90 right now, somewhere in that range. There may be 200 sitting and waiting for a trained dog to be available. You just can't go down and buy them at Walmart. They're a rare commodity, these specific PTSD dogs.

MR. HALMAN: Where in Canada are the service dogs being trained? I understand in Winnipeg that's happening. Is there anywhere else in Canada that you know that these service dogs are being trained to help our veterans?

MR. WESSEL: I don't have the specific locations in Canada. I know where we get ours for our program and that's through CARES, and that's in Kansas. Val may be able to address the locations that are becoming available. I know we want to try to develop a training centre here in Nova Scotia. If the funds were available we would love to be able to have a school here in Nova Scotia, but we don't have the financial means to create a school here in Nova Scotia. It has been a dream of ours. We've thought about it, but we just don't have the means. Maybe that could be a government program.

[2:45 p.m.]

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Paws Fur Thought exclusively uses the school in Kansas that Comrade Wessel talked about. The reason for that is that there are very few schools already in existence in Canada that utilize the globally-accepted practices for training-assist dogs, whether that's diabetic or epileptic or post-traumatic stress. It has been very difficult for us to actually find a school in Canada, although when the program began we did deal with a couple out of Manitoba, but since that time we found it necessary to deal only and exclusively with the school in Kansas.

As you likely know, the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia also works with Paws Fur Thought to train dogs for first responders and they are also involved in the various programs through the IWK and the justice system in providing comfort canine assists to children. Through that arm of Paws Fur Thought, there is a school that is coming onboard. They actually have two of our puppies right now and it's called CIAD and it's in the Lunenburg County area, some of you are familiar with it. We have two dogs in that school and in that program and of course we support the heck out of this, the success of CIAD, so we're looking forward to our two little puppies coming online from there and moving forward with that school, but these standards need to be developed before that.

To sort of add to Comrade Wessel's comment about the availability of dogs, with Paws Fur Thought on the veterans' side right now, we have an 18-month waiting list. There's no way we can keep up with the dogs, not with the type of program that we offer through the school in Kansas. There are shorter ways of going about that but we do not subscribe to those practices. I hope that helped.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I was interested to know through your outreach programs, if you have - I know there's a program for homeless veterans. What are the numbers of homeless and what are you doing for them? I know there's a program called Leave the Streets Behind that you have, but what are the numbers here in Nova Scotia and what are you doing? If you can increase on that, that would be great.

MR. WESSEL: We actually developed a program to try to actually physically get boots on the ground, so to speak, and get people out into the community and find veterans who were in need of a place to stay - immediate assistance, immediate housing.

Throughout our years of developing our programs, we found that the instances of near-homelessness are much greater than homelessness itself here in Nova Scotia. Yes, there are veterans who are out there on the street who may need a place to stay. We're finding that the greatest need right now is the possibility of making sure that we keep the veteran in the home that they're already in, making sure that they don't become homeless. That is our greatest drive right now, to make sure that we keep people in their home.

We found instances of veterans who may be couch-surfing, so to speak - they surf from one friend to another on their couch. They are off the streets, yes, but they are that close to being homeless. The family problems that exist, we're trying to deal with the family aspect of it as well, keeping families together so that we don't get a breakup, so that you don't get the veteran walking out of his house and ending up on the street, or being thrown out of his house and end up on the street. We are dealing more with the near homelessness and the threat of homelessness, as opposed to the actual veteran on the street without a place to stay.

MS. DICOSTANZO: That's what I was looking for - as long as we don't have that many on the streets. I see people in the mornings collecting money and I'm wondering sometimes, are these veterans or have they PTSD-related issues, how do you know? I was looking for numbers from you if you know if that still exists or not. I'm happy to hear that hopefully we don't have that.

MR. WESSEL: I must clarify that I'm not saying that we don't have that. I don't think that there is any agency that can give you an exact number of how many veterans are out on the street right now because you'll get an estimate and the estimate is either exceeded or decreased at one point or another.

We are finding in the Ontario region where the Leave the Streets Behind program developed through our Ontario Command of the Legion, they have recognized quite a few veterans in the Ontario area. Obviously you're dealing with large metropolitan cities and a lot of people on the street because they figure they can go there and the chances of earning a dollar are a little bit greater in a big city as opposed to some of our small Nova Scotia cities.

I don't think anybody can put a figure on how many veterans are either homeless or about to become homeless - we just can't guess. We're dealing with over 30,000 new veterans, so to speak, that were deployed in Afghanistan. Over 30,000 Canadian veterans were deployed and they have come back to this country with varying degrees of incapacitation, whether it be a loss of a limb or whether it be an unseen wound.

Our governments are slow to react to the new influx of veterans that we have here and their needs. We're trying as best we can as an organization to try to deal with what we can deal with, but there is an ever-increasing number of people that are identifying as the years go by of having some sort of problem - whether it be physical or mental - as result of



their service overseas, and it's going to increase. The number of people identifying is going to increase. It's not going to get less; it's going to increase.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: To add to the conversation around the issue of homelessness in the veteran community, absolutely in Nova Scotia the risk of homelessness is greater than homelessness. I'd like to explain how Nova Scotia Nunavut Command actually is proactive in making sure that those who are at risk or those who are homeless know that we can provide assistance.

In our presentation, Comrade Wessel mentioned all of the organizations that we coordinate with. Through all of those organizations they understand the poppy trust funds and Benevolent Fund financial and emergency assistance is available through the Royal Canadian Legion. We also work quite extensively with the shelter system, as well as the food bank system and the community gathering places for those who don't necessarily have a stable roof over their heads. Veterans Affairs Canada is also well aware of what the Royal Canadian Legion provides to veterans who are in emergency financial distress.

So certainly we've crossed all the t's and dotted the i's, and work with other individuals and organizations and social services that may have people present to them that are in that situation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Wessel, you have been around for a while. I don't mean to suggest that you're old, but I see a life membership badge in front of that jacket that you wear. That means you've been around for a while. You've seen a lot of things. You've seen the veteran as we describe them - the definition change. What's the difference in today's veteran versus those guys who may be from World War II that some of us may have remembered? Their numbers are now dwindling, but certainly we all have known them over the years - you more than I. Again, not to suggest that you are old.

MR. WESSEL: Yes, I have seen that. I know that the definition of a veteran in the public's eye, so to speak, may be the same as it was years ago - it's those who served during wartime. The Royal Canadian Legion has a specific definition of a veteran that includes all those who have served or are serving. So you see those of our Canadian Forces members who are walking down the street and wearing the uniform - go up to them and say, thank you very much, shake their hand, thank them for their service. They are veterans of this country whether they have been deployed. They may be domestic in their veteran status but there are a lot of them who have served and have been deployed, whether it be on a peacekeeping or peacemaking mission or whatever.

Our definition of a veteran includes not only our Canadian Forces personnel but our RCMP as well. We have RCMP who are deployed in various stations around the world and they also are representing Canada, as a policeman in those states. Our military is not a

police force, so they are deployed to help and to assist our military in situations around the world where a police action is required. We have a lot of RCMP that are involved as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A supplemental, Mr. Porter?

MR. PORTER: Just as a follow-up to that, there's also a difference in - I'll call it the need of the veteran. It's different than it was. I think about the older veterans - I'll use my wife's grandfather who is now gone. Both of them are gone, both veterans - one of the Korean Conflict and one of World War II - who would take advantage of nothing. They never applied for benefits. Much later, towards the end of their lives, family members encouraged them and got them signed up to get some assistance when they went to get their groceries or if they needed something done to their homes, a variety of different programs over the years that were available.

Many of those older veterans, though, when I think back about that, never took advantage, never asked for anything, never talked about it, did nothing with Veterans Affairs, if you will. Maybe there were some other things going on behind the scenes quietly through the Legion and others, I don't know, but you never heard anything of it.

That has changed drastically today. I've been sitting around for about near 12 years I guess in this place and a lot of years on this committee as well and I've heard from your colleagues over the years. Things are different today - the needs, the challenges or the desires or the asks. Maybe people are more open to asking for help when they need it or we're doing more toward it, I'm not sure what that is. Maybe you can speak to that a bit.

MR. WESSEL: I guess you have to look at the generation, I suppose, that these people that you are talking about grew up in. They were more self-sufficient - I don't know whether you would say more self-sufficient or they were less apt to ask for social assistance. They volunteered, especially those who volunteered during the First World War and the Second World War - they volunteered for their service. They served their country and if they were lucky enough to return home, they got out of uniform and they got back into the workforce and they went about developing their life again.

They weren't apt to ask for assistance in any way; that's not the way they were brought up. I'm not saying that that's the way our generations have been brought up now but one of the reasons that the Royal Canadian Legion was started in 1926 was because of our war veterans who were in that type of position - they didn't ask for help so they went without and some of them died destitute because of it. So the veterans who did survive and came back said we're not going to let that happen, we can't let that happen. Organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion started because of that, to try to develop programs to try to develop advocacy through the government to say hey, even though these veterans are not asking for their assistance, they deserve it.

The government should be stepping forward and providing this assistance. A lot of the assistance that has been developed throughout that time has been because of the

advocacy of the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations pressing the federal government to say hey, you guys have a responsibility towards our veterans. I think that obviously still to this day there are veterans out there that go without when they shouldn't, and there are veterans out there that use the small bit of assistance that we can supply when it should be supplied through the federal government through Veterans Affairs. We're doing as best we can.

[3:00 p.m.]

I don't know whether Val would like to - she is the wife and mother and daughter of veterans. My dad was also a World War II veteran as well, but hers is close at hand right now because she's dealing with her son who returned from Afghanistan.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I guess just to add to the conversation, I will clarify that I am the daughter of a Korean War veteran, the sister of a Bosnia-Croatian veteran, and the mother of an Afghanistan veteran. And this is just to add to the greater conversation that we're having around the issues that you brought up, but I think it's important to note that the individuals that are seeking benefits, entitlements, and supports from Veterans Affairs Canada in this day and age are more career soldiers rather than the World War I and the World War II veterans as well as some of the Korean veterans who fought in those conflicts.

I think I'd like to make sure that that point is certainly on the table. I believe not only through my work, but in my personal life having associated with veterans from so many different generations, some would argue that the role of the Canadian Armed Forces from World War I, World War II, and Korea certainly changed in times such as Somalia, Rwanda and the Bosnia-Croatia conflicts and certainly in Afghanistan. I've had elderly veterans say to me, I could tell who my enemy was, I knew what our mission was.

That's just to add to the conversation and add perhaps that perspective to some of the statements that you made. Thank you for that opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. JESSOME: I would like to go back to the conversation around services provided in your outreach efforts. I'll put it into the context - actually, today's meeting is fairly timely. I just had an individual approach my constituency assistant and make a comment and share a concern about - I'll say a couple or a group of individuals who are providing a service to veterans to, I believe, fill out paperwork that would help them access their disability entitlements, and additionally it sounds like you guys know who or what I'm talking about.

If you are able to provide some comments specifically to that scenario or I guess just generally about perhaps what's available to veterans through your organization in

terms of protection against fraud or educating them about their options within or under the roof of Veterans Affairs or the Legion services.

MR. WESSEL: I would start by saying that you're referring to our service officer program in Nova Scotia. Every Legion branch, of which there are about 103 right now in Nova Scotia, most all of them have a volunteer service officer within that branch that any veteran can approach with regard to assistance.

We have two professional service officers in our command headquarters who work under the guidance of Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte. I'm leaving it at that and saying that I'm going to turn the floor back to Valerie because this is her bailiwick with regard to this and she has direct control of this and deals with it on a daily basis. She would be best to speak to about that. I do know what you're talking about, and there are people who are asking for money to help fill out these forms and that when the individual may not know that the service is available through our service bureau at the Royal Canadian Legion.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Certainly Comrade Wessel gave a good overview of how our operation works. The best I can liken it for example is to advise you that our command service officers are basically Veterans Affairs case managers. They have access to the client service delivery network. They have enhanced reliability, privacy permissions. They can do everything that a client service manager and a case manager does with Veterans Affairs Canada.

Our branch service officers sort of act, as Comrade Wessel mentioned, as our boots on the ground. Of course, we can't be in absolutely every community with only two staff people who actually do this. Our branch service officers are dispatched to get signatures on forms and to help veterans complete forms - or families who are applying for entitlements.

We train our branch service officers on an annual basis and communicate with them on a regular basis on any updates through Veterans Affairs that they need to be aware of. Our command service officers are professionally developed several times a year through Veterans Affairs Canada.

Unfortunately, we have seen an increase in individuals and some organizations that say that they are veterans advocacy organizations and offering to complete paperwork. Let's face it, it's extremely daunting. It's extremely complicated, especially for anyone who has a mental health injury. It's even more complicated to complete some of these forms and to go through this process. We see more and more individuals and businesses standing up and saying, for a percentage of your benefit, we will complete these forms. We do this free of charge.

Just for reference points, we are the second-busiest command in the country, and we do carry the largest number of files for applications for still-serving members in the country.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Follow-up, Mr. Jessome?

MR. JESSOME: Thank you for that answer. I guess not exclusively related to this part of our conversation around the fees being charged for said paperwork - you touched on it in your opening comments, Mr. Wessel, the partnership that exists in individual communities across the nation, I'll say. You talked about a couple of different organizations.

Are there deliberate, intentional things that you would recommend that we do in our constituency offices? We want to be advocates. We want to have information that's accessible to veterans and all constituents. From your perspective, are there deliberate, specific things that are helpful that you have noticed? Perhaps veterans have come to you folks and said, it was nice to see X in my MLA's office. I'll stop repeating myself - are there deliberate things that we can do that aid your cause and help us be conduits to your organization or others?

MR. WESSEL: I'll defer to Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I have provided my business card, as has Comrade Wessel. I think the most responsible thing you can do in your offices is to be very careful about potential misinformation. This is one of your portfolios, you have many things to do in your positions in representing the people in your constituencies. You are dealing with something that's extremely complicated, that is quickly and forever changing. I guess that's always my biggest concern, that people think they're being helpful but they're actually leading people down a wrong path or providing misinformation.

The best thing you could do is refer them to us. We will connect them with the supports; if it's not us, then we will connect them with other veterans' organizations or other supports that will address whatever issues they are having. I think that's the most responsible thing you can do.

I'd like to add to that, I think another very responsible thing you could do if you really want to affect the lives of individual veterans and their families in this province is to read the material that each of your Parties have been provided on the veteran medical centre that is proposed and that has been introduced in the Legislature just a couple of months ago. We will meet, that committee, with the Department of Health and Wellness in January so we do hope to move forward with that. Hopefully, if you don't have that information, you will contact me and I can provide it directly to you. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacKay.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to address my remarks and questions to both witnesses. Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte, thank you for your sage advice on that last comment, I think that was very appropriate. I think you've appeared before the committee before, so welcome back.

Mr. Wessel, I'm not sure that you've been here before but reading through some of the notes that we have, I'd certainly like to recognize and commend you for the tremendous amount of service you've been doing for our veterans. I think we need to acknowledge that here today.

Many of the questions today have regarded, as you said, those who suffer incapacitation, be it physical or mental trauma, whatever, and some of the challenges reintegrating into civilian life perhaps and into our society. I'd like to maybe expand on one of the other things, though, that I think I picked up on for support for veterans and that's in second career support.

Certainly, I suppose we're all aware that some senior officers can leave military service and secure fairly lucrative consulting projects for some periods of time but I'm more interested in the reintegration of those up through the ranks who have developed tremendous technical skills, trade skills and so forth and how we, as a province, could benefit from those skills, sometimes which we even decry are lacking here - we're losing young people to go to other provinces or countries. When you mentioned that you do provide second career support for veterans, that really caught my attention. I was wondering if perhaps you could expand on that.

MR. WESSEL: To answer your first question, I appeared probably before any of you guys were serving on here, back in about 1999 or 2000, with regard to the veterans' licence plates. I brought that program here to this committee and I appreciated the support that we got from this committee in developing that program. It has been on our roads since 2000, for 17 years now, and it has now expanded right across the country. Every other province followed our lead and have developed veterans' licence plates as well, and I thank you very much for your comments with regard to my service to veterans.

[3:15 p.m.]

Now, to get to your main question with regard to our programs with regard to developing a second career. We work with a psychologist, Dr. John Whalen, who has developed a couple of programs, one of them being Aftershock. Basically in a nutshell it's a program that he is developing for men and women facing transition - out of uniform and into civilian life and into another career. That is one of the programs that we're actively trying to develop here in Nova Scotia to help our veterans who are leaving the service and trying to get back into civilian life and civilian jobs. It is a program in development and it's something that we're hoping will expand, but right at the moment it's in its infancy.

Val may have a little bit more. I keep referring to Val, but she's the grease that keeps this wheel moving in her chair in our office in our headquarters. She deals with every single one of these aspects of the Royal Canadian Legion and she's an intelligent woman who keeps her finger on the pulse of everything that's going on. She may have a little bit more to say with regard to our relationship with Dr. Whalen and this Aftershock program.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I believe Comrade Wessel gave a good overview of the Aftershock program and the various other transition programs that he mentioned in the original presentation. To add though to that conversation, I would like to say that certainly Nova Scotia Nunavut Command supports what I understand to be a potential initiative to have the Department of Labour and Advanced Education in Nova Scotia recognize or provide some sort of equivalency for trades in the military for those that are releasing and to actually provide qualifying factors and licensing based on that translation.

Sorry, that's kind of a long explanation of that, but that's kind of how I understand it in my mind. You of course know exactly what I'm talking about.

I believe initiatives such as that show a good understanding of what's required to support those that can look at a second career, and having them stay in Nova Scotia or move to Nova Scotia and increase our population.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacKay, a follow-up?

MR. MACKAY: Does the follow-up have to be specific to the original question or am I allowed to wander a little bit?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. MACKAY: Okay, I'll take a little licence on that. I'm curious about the Nova Scotia Nunavut relationship. Of course in Nunavut I assume that we've got our Rangers up there who form an integral part of Canadian presence in our North. I'm wondering with different programs whether Nova Scotia and the territory of Nunavut are aligned in providing supports such as the Capital Assistance Program or anything else that you might comment on in regard to the relationship.

MR. WESSEL: I guess I will start. I'll go backwards a little bit in time and give you an idea of how we became Nova Scotia Nunavut Command. Prior to 1998 we were just Nova Scotia Command. We were a provincial command, and the territory of Nunavut came into existence. There are two branches in Nunavut. One is in Iqaluit and the other one is in Rankin Inlet. These two independent branches were just independent branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, but being independent they couldn't participate in conventions or in sporting activities or anything like that, so they wished to become adjoined with a command.

So through our head office in Ottawa they said, well, they're right up above Quebec, you should align yourself with Quebec Command. Quebec Command said no - just for whatever reason, that's their reasons. They asked the branches in Nunavut who they would like to be associated with and they said Nova Scotia because there was a little bit of history between the Inuit and here in Halifax, through shipping. They chose Nova Scotia and we said yes, so we have been associated with Nunavut for quite a few years now, since 1998.

Anyway, with regard to programs that may be available, there aren't a lot of veterans who are settled in the territory of Nunavut. The territorial government would be responsible for that, as opposed to anything that we might offer here through our command headquarters. We offer assistance with regard to anything related to the Royal Canadian Legion but for veterans, we would supply support with regard to any program they may wish to develop up there. They have a great relationship with the cadet program in Iqaluit, but with regard to our veteran population, there's not a large veteran population in the North. I hope that has answered your question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I'll ask three quick questions, hopefully, because I know our time is limited. The first one is on membership. I'm proud to be a member of the Calais Branch in Sackville for 28 years, interesting enough, but I noticed that our membership numbers were down a bit this year. How is the health of the 103 branches and subsequent to that, the membership? I know it's always a challenge, I would assume that's probably the answer.

MR. WESSEL: Yes, it is a challenge, Mr. Wilson. It always has been and always will be because we lose a lot of members per year just through attrition, but we develop a lot of new members as well and surprisingly so, although the national average may drop, here in Nova Scotia we have kept quite stable in our membership numbers. I say "quite stable" in the fact that our percentage of decrease is not the same as the national average. I think being more of a military-centred community here in Nova Scotia, there's more of a relationship to the Royal Canadian Legion. I don't know whatever the answer is but we seem to have kept our membership a little bit more stable here.

Yes, there are problems and we have to recognize and make known that anybody can become a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, any Canadian citizen can become a member of the Royal Canadian Legion now. It was always an association before but anybody who agrees to the Articles of Faith of the Royal Canadian Legion can become a member and should become a member. I thank you for being a member for the last 28 years.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know there's a lot of great work being had across the province in trying to recruit younger people to the Legion. Maybe for some of the new members on the committee, over the last 14 years, almost 15 years that I've been elected, I often turn to the Legion, the command, for their opinion, their stance on certain issues. It seems to come up every so many years. There's two of them I'd just like to confirm with you - especially after Remembrance Day there's always the talk around a statutory holiday for Remembrance Day. In Nova Scotia, I know we have the Remembrance Day Act and throughout the years, if I'm not mistaken, command has said no, we support the Remembrance Day Act, we would not like to see a push for a statutory holiday. Is that still the position of command?



MR. WESSEL: Yes, it is. We feel that the Remembrance Day Act here in Nova Scotia is more than sufficient to include all those who should be included or would like to be included in our Remembrance Day activities, especially the younger school-age children. We find that they come out in the thousands to our Remembrance Day services. We have our veteran speakers from various Legions who go out into the schools and talk to younger students about their life in the military and their learning. If we were to just say, let's just make it a national holiday, then what are national holidays? They're a time to get together with your family or to go on vacation or go back to the cottage or wherever, and it's going to just be another day off at that point and we're going to lose our focus as to what Remembrance Day is all about - and that's about gathering together.

Right now in Nova Scotia, we have huge crowds at our cenotaphs - you've seen them I'm sure when you visit them. They grow every year and it's due to the fact that we recognize that Remembrance Day is not a holiday, so to speak. It's a day for remembrance.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for that. I know I have been asked on a number of occasions over the years, so I'm glad that's still the position.

I think you touched a little bit on it and I'm not sure if you took a stance or have an opinion on it - it is around housing for veterans in relationship with Camp Hill. I know over the last few months it has been quiet but over the last number of years there have been a number of situations in Nova Scotia where the definition of a veteran or who can gain access to the long-term care facility at Camp Hill has been in question.

I know I've called upon the federal government. I haven't gotten an answer yet on if they would look at changing the requirements of pre-Korean as their definition of a veteran to gain access to Camp Hill - the long-term care part of this. I know it's separate from the medical clinic.

Have you had a discussion? Have you taken a stance or do you have an opinion on whether - especially with the sheer number of current day veterans that we have - the federal government should look at changing the criteria to allow more veterans to gain access to long-term care, especially at Camp Hill - and around the province? I mean, there are designated Veterans Affairs beds in nursing homes all over the province.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Nova Scotia Nunavut Command of the Royal Canadian Legion supports Camp Hill Veterans Memorial facility to be available to all veterans. To us, a veteran is a veteran is a veteran. That's it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Adams.

MS. ADAMS: Thank you for that, I happened to have worked in the VMB and so I can appreciate that sentiment. As a health professional I'm always interested in numbers. Again, when I ask for this I am aware that it's very difficult to pull them together, but I just wanted to mention a few numbers because we're having a very civilized conversation, but

when you get outside of here and you talk about the urgency of some of the people you know, the numbers really do matter.

This is taken from the homeless veterans. It's the Legion's own article from November 30, 2017 and it's about homeless veterans. It mentions that in 2014 there were over 16,000 people who were homeless at some point in Canada and 338 were veterans, which is 2.1 per cent. In Nova Scotia, Halifax alone, which is half our population was 3.3 per cent. That's a number that we don't want, so when we're thinking of all the programs you're targeting, we assume you're targeting that particular group.

We have two homeless shelters in Halifax that have 100 beds, but one of the things that they've commented here is that the number of days that those beds are used has gone way up to 90 per cent occupancy. They're hardly ever empty. The number of days in a shelter from 2005 to 2014 has gone, in the average age of an adult our age, went from 10 to 18 days, and almost every age group has doubled. So there might only be a 3 per cent, but they're staying twice as long as in the past.

One of the other numbers, for those over 65, the number of veterans versus non-veterans - it was 3 per cent for non-veterans and 9.5 per cent for veterans. That is very troubling because they're dealing with all sorts of mobility issues, in addition to whatever mental health issues they've got going on.

[3:30 p.m.]

The other statistic, which was from December 7<sup>th</sup> in *The Globe and Mail* was about veterans facing much higher suicide rates than civilians. It's 24 out of 100,000 non-veterans in Canada who commit suicide, and 37 out of 100,000 veterans. One number I want to read out, because my son is in the Air Force, and his fiancé is 25. It says, "Young men faced the greatest suicide risk, government researchers found. Suicide claimed 40 per cent of the 435 male vets who died before turning 25." Just from these numbers and from my experience personally and professionally, we have a lot of different at-risk groups, the under-25 and the over-65.

The third at-risk group, I'll just show you. I know Hansard can't see this - the number of support services for somebody who has a military-induced injury, whether it's physical or psychological. They get every opportunity and support. But those who did not get injured in that particular way in the military are cut off from a whole lot of services.

That's a long-winded way of saying that when we look at what your programs are offering versus all of the organizations that you network with, do you target these higher-risk groups of under-25, over-65, and those who were not injured in the military? Are your programs specifically targeting those groups? If so, how do you measure your success in reaching out to them compared to those who may have a home, may still be employed, or may have a work-related injury that gets them a whole lot of benefits that those without getting injured in the military have access to? That's for both presenters.

MR. WESSEL: Thank you, Ms. Adams, for that. I don't hold a lot of credence in statistics with regard to homelessness and those that you have quoted. At one time we're talking about specific numbers, and then they throw in, oh, and a portion of that are veterans. We don't know what portion of those veterans are actually the ones who are staying longer in a shelter - whether they are the veterans or whether they're just the non-veteran portion of our society. It's hard for us to recognize that.

With regard to us specifically targeting individual age groups or whatever, I would say no, we don't target anyone. We target veterans. Val has said a veteran is a veteran is a veteran. When we have somebody approach us or identify that they need help, we don't ask how old they are. We just know that they have served and they need our help. We identify the fact that this person is a veteran - whether they be male or female, young or old - and we will do whatever we can to assist them in whatever way we can. That's the best way I can answer that, the fact that we don't specifically target any individual group, so to speak.

You're right on your statistics with regard to suicide, though. This is going to hit really close to Val, but we have to realize that those who are returning with the non-physical injuries, the mental injuries that are the hidden injuries - I say this again - they still haven't identified themselves as being injured yet. One, it's due to pride - they're not supposed to hurt, they're our soldiers. Two, it could jeopardize their career, and they're still serving members of the military. They aren't going to ask for help. They're the ones that we go to and ask for help. They aren't going to ask for help. These guys are proud, proud men and women. There's still a lot of them out there who haven't identified, so we have that instance of suicide because that's their way of coping. It's a terrible, terrible thing to say that way, but that's their way of coping with it.

I know Val wants to speak on this, too.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: You certainly covered a lot of topics and a lot of material and statistics, which, let's face it, boil down to people. Some of the statistics you quoted were national statistics. We speak to what falls within our jurisdiction, which is Nova Scotia and the Territory of Nunavut.

Without rehashing everything that everyone has in front of you, I'd like to point out a number of things; some of these things, you are more aware of than I am aware of. Certainly I think no one could deny that there's a total lack of affordable housing within the Province of Nova Scotia. We're not the only province that faces that, but certainly that contributes to the longer stays that you are seeing in shelters for those who find themselves to be homeless.

Not always are individuals homeless because they are financially marginalized. In those statistics, those individuals who are counted as homeless aren't necessarily in a shelter. They've had to move into a hotel for a few days until we can help them or some

other organization can help them find an apartment to actually purchase possessions, because sometimes it's relationships falling apart or rents have skyrocketed.

What is definitely lacking and is a major gap for those who have been diagnosed with mental health or moral injuries and find themselves at risk of homelessness, is the lack of transitional housing in this province, transitional housing that is developed specifically for veterans. Even though we do utilize the shelters - especially within the HRM - it becomes difficult at times to place veterans in those shelters, because the level of comfort or security is not there for the veteran.

We also face challenges with some of the shelter systems in placing veterans in shelters that have rules and regulations around certain substances that are being utilized as medication by the veterans, but aren't necessarily looked at as medication from the shelter's perspectives.

There's some very practical reasons that those statistics are telling you a certain story. I think I just wanted to sort of put that in your minds as well, the lack of transitional housing is huge. Even though we participated and sit at the table, a couple of other organizations that are working toward that, we don't see any other organization other than ourselves taking practical steps to provide that sort of transitional housing and shelter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Adams, I was wondering if you could submit those documents, the various ones that you have, to our administrative assistant. (Interruption) Okay, secondary. Go for it.

MS. ADAMS: Thank you. The Veterans Memorial Medical Centre that is so important to the veterans in this province, and I am a huge supporter of that process, when you think about all the current programs that are already offered because in this last paragraph here when we talk about all of the other programs and organizations, like the Military Family Resource Centres, Support for Troops - I know what I believe it will bring to this province and the value that it would have because it would centralize a lot of care and bring best practices and you could do the research that is necessary to ensure government that you are making the best use of the money that has been provided.

I'm wondering if you could put in your own words what you think the critical need for the Veterans Memorial Medical Centre here is in Nova Scotia, and who it is so important to you and to all of the veterans that you represent.

MR. WESSEL: I'll start off but I know I'm going to turn the floor right over to Val because she sits on the committee. I will state my opinion - you asked for our opinions. You are dealing with a group of individuals who can't necessarily access our standard medical facilities. If we have a veteran who is suffering from PTSD or some sort of mental injury that he or she received while serving Canada, they can't find themselves walking into an emergency room or sitting in a medical office waiting to see a doctor because the

things that they may see or hear is a trigger for them. They need to be in a situation that is specific to their needs and their requirements as veterans of this country.

We have the facilities. We have the knowledge of the fact that they require these specific treatments, and they deserve it. If they were to walk into this facility, be greeted by a fellow veteran and spend time talking with that veteran while they wait to see a physician or whoever it is that they may be waiting to see, that's a huge step forward for them, to make them feel comfortable.

I know as I stated, Val sits on that committee so she would be able to discuss that in a little bit greater detail.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I guess it kind of boils down to a few very fundamental points. First, it's absolutely no surprise to any of you that we have a doctor shortage in Nova Scotia. So imagine if you're an individual that moves here that has very complex conditions that the average Nova Scotian general practitioner has no experience with and no real depth of knowledge.

Once you leave the military all of the wonderful health care that you received while in the military ceases, but all of a sudden you have all of this paperwork that needs to be completed right down to diagnosis and treatment plans, and all of that hinges on whether you receive any kind of treatment whatsoever, or if you receive any money. Let's face it, money makes the world go 'round. You can't keep a roof over your head, you can't feed your kids if you don't have the money.

So without a doctor, the end game is no diagnosis, no treatment. Can we talk about the complications of possibly no treatment in Nova Scotia? I think we don't need to discuss that. We have lived possibly with the results of lack of treatment or not full treatment that happened in Tracadie about a year ago.

It's absolutely key that this population be removed from the rest of us in Nova Scotia who are also scrambling to find doctors so that we can actually treat these individuals and lead them toward a more healthy and stable life - including the lives of their families. I think it kind of boils down to those basic principles and I don't think I need to belabour that. You can all make those connections.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo, a final question?

MS. DICOSTANZO: I'm wondering, Veterans Affairs - you get finances both from federal and provincial? No? Just provincial? You don't receive anything from the feds - no help whatsoever? For some reason I thought there was federal and provincial help. I apologize. Thank you.

[3:45 p.m.]

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: If I could just sort of stress the point, because obviously we were not clear, and I want to make sure that we're very clear. We receive absolutely no funding from the federal government nor the provincial government for the Royal Canadian Legion nor any of our programs, except for the Legion Capital Assistance Program, which is a program of the Province of Nova Scotia. All of our programs are delivered and all of our operations are either covered through membership dues or funds raised during the annual poppy campaign.

We have six staff at the command, otherwise every other member within our organization is a volunteer and we are run by volunteers. We are Canada's largest veteran and community volunteer organization.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you so much. I'll give you the opportunity to make some closing remarks. Who would like to start? Mr. Wessel.

MR. WESSEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief. I would just like to thank you, as chairman, and the committee for the opportunity to come here today and the opportunity to explain a little bit with regard to our programs and maybe shed a little light on what the Royal Canadian Legion actually is involved in and what we're doing for our veteran population. It's a little bit more than just having a Legion building in your community and a place for veterans to go and relax and talk amongst themselves, it's more than that nowadays. The modern Legion is active and extremely involved in the lives and welfare of our veteran population.

I hope you have had your questions answered here today and you have a little bit better understanding of what we do as an organization. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I thank you so much. Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte.

MS. MITCHELL VEINOTTE: Thank you very much. I have left my business card at each of your spots. I would welcome your contact at any time to discuss any issue as it relates to veterans of all ages and all stages and any questions you may have with regard to the Royal Canadian Legion.

I'd like to thank you for your efforts on behalf of all veterans of Nova Scotia, as the daughter of a veteran, the sister of a veteran and the mother of a veteran, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Again thank you so much for answering all these questions today. I think they've been very informative to the committee and also I'm sure you are pleased to be able to answer those questions. Thank you very much.

We're going to take a couple of minutes before we get back.

[3:47 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:50 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Halman.

MR. HALMAN: I'd like to put forward a motion to the committee with respect to the letter from the Canadian Youth Remembrance Society. As the regular members from the PC caucus for this committee - Hon. Alfie MacLeod and Ms. Karla MacFarlane - are not present, I'd like to put forward a motion that the letter here from the PC caucus, which outlines the requests of the Canadian Youth Remembrance Society, be deferred to the meeting in January.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter.

MR. PORTER: I guess as an amendment to that motion I would move that the letter be accepted and that we move forward with inviting these fine folks from the Canadian Youth Remembrance Society at some point onto our agenda.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that acceptable to everyone? Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I do support that, but I do wish hopefully that our topic gets a scheduled date. I noticed that topics from the Liberal caucus and PC caucus have been scheduled. None from ours as yet and I don't know what the delay is. It's specifically around the provincial-federal agreement with Camp Hill.

Not that I don't want - because I know this organization, I would love to have them here but I would hope there would be an emphasis on the approved witness lists first and then I'm more than happy to add another one to it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, I've been told that we have it scheduled for March 20<sup>th</sup>. It has not been confirmed.

The other issue was correspondence from Ms. Rachel Watts. We had passed at the last meeting that it would be allowed to be looked at and considered and come back to this meeting for decisions. Yes, Mr. MacKay.

MR. MACKAY: Just to speak to that, Ms. Watts is a constituent of Chester-St. Margaret's. We have had previous correspondence from her, in addition to the most recent. We have reached out to her, have replied to her correspondence which was sent to a number of both provincial MLAs and federal MPs. We have from my office reached out to her and we're awaiting getting confidentiality agreements signed by her that allow us to look a little further into her inquiries, which are on behalf of her uncle.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So I'm assuming we will not do anything at this moment but when you get that information we may be able to?

MR. MACKAY: I don't think there's any additional information to bring forward at this time. If we do have pertinent information in the future, we'll bring it back to this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. The next meeting, we have to change the date from January 16<sup>th</sup> to January 23<sup>rd</sup>. An out of town caucus is the reason. Mr. Porter.

MR. PORTER: I would so move that we move our meeting of January 16<sup>th</sup> to accommodate the NDP caucus, to January 23<sup>rd</sup>, provided that works with the clerk and it fits in with the rest of the schedule in this place and whenever it might be that is convenient and it works. (Interruption) It works? There we go.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next meeting will be January 23<sup>rd</sup> and the presentations would be the Veterans for Healing, Egypt Falls, witness Fabian Henry.

If that's all, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:55 p.m.]