



# Salute!

Veterans Affairs Canada: Proudly Serving Canada's Veteran Community | November 2005



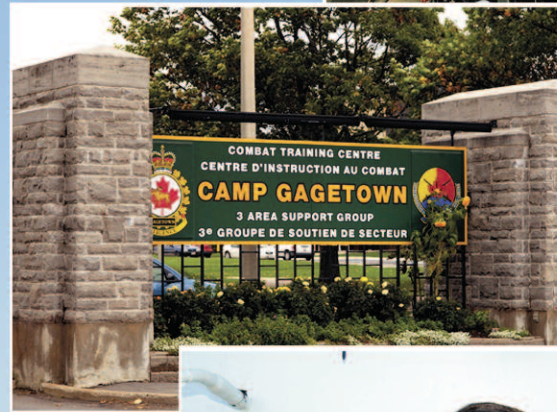
THE NEW  
**VETERANS  
CHARTER**  
For CF Veterans and their Families



LA NOUVELLE CHARTE DES  
**ANCIENS  
COMBATTANTS**  
À l'intention des anciens combattants des FC et de leurs familles

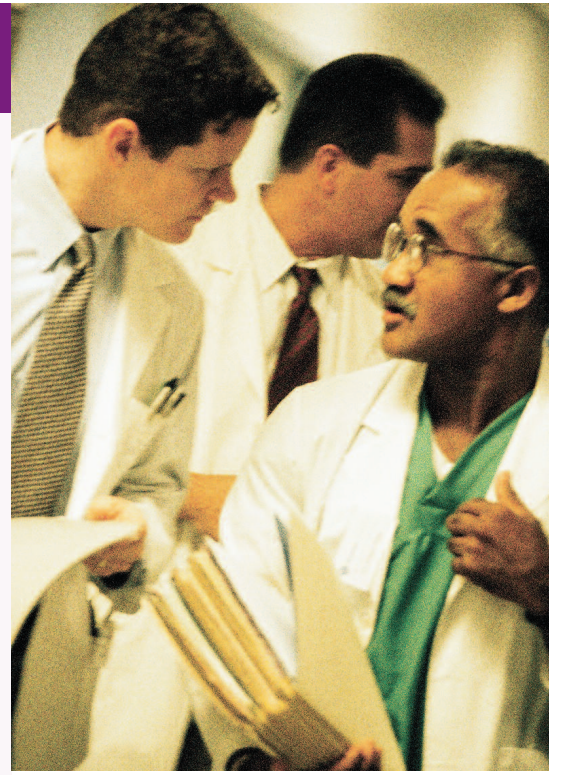
## In this Special Issue ...

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Over the past while, many of our *Salute!* readers may have been following news reports about Agent Orange or military-related stress conditions, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In this special issue of *Salute!*, we'd like to share with you some key facts about these issues and let you know about programs and services that are in place to support clients who need help.





## What is Agent Orange?

Herbicides are used to get rid of the unwanted leaves on plants and weeds. In June 1966 and June 1967, Agent Orange was tested on some areas of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gagetown in New Brunswick. Since the 1950s, other herbicides have also been used at the base. In some cases, exposure to Agent Orange is associated with certain illnesses or medical conditions.

### The IOM

The US Institute of Medicine (IOM) is the leading scientific authority on Agent Orange. The IOM has identified several medical conditions that have an association with Agent Orange exposure. These conditions include:

- soft-tissue sarcoma
- non Hodgkin's lymphoma
- chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL)
- Hodgkin's disease
- chloracne
- respiratory cancers
- prostate cancer
- multiple myeloma
- type 2 diabetes
- porphyria cutanea tarda
- acute and sub-acute transient peripheral neuropathy

Our Department accepts the findings of the IOM. We use these findings to help rule on pension applications in relation to Agent Orange. More information on the IOM can be found at [www.iom.edu](http://www.iom.edu)

## Exposure to Agent Orange

Exposure to Agent Orange in a way likely to be a risk to your health means that the chemical entered your body. This could happen if:

- you breathed in the chemical;
- you swallowed the chemical; or
- the chemical touched your skin.

### Examples of exposure to Agent Orange include:

- direct involvement in preparing Agent Orange herbicide formulas;
- direct use of Agent Orange; or
- direct involvement in clean-up operations after Agent Orange was used.

## Agent Orange Disability Claims

Agent Orange-related disability pension claims are not new to our Department. The claims that have the greatest chance of success are those which provide evidence of direct exposure, and are supported by the conclusions of the Institute of Medicine. Veterans Affairs has awarded disability pensions to a total of 11 of 44 such claimants since 1995. Pensions have been awarded for both service in Vietnam and at Gagetown.

## What we're doing to help...

**1** We have set up two special units to help process disability pension applications from Veterans who believe they are ill due to Agent Orange exposure. There is a centralized pension claim preparation unit in Saint John, New Brunswick and an expert Review Team in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

**2** Including those already adjudicated, we are looking closely at the files of Veterans:

- who have medical conditions shown to have an association with exposure to Agent Orange; and
- who served at Gagetown; but have not yet provided evidence of exposure.

We will work with these Veterans and other applicants to determine if they were, in fact, exposed. We want to be sure we have all of the available evidence.

**3** As the Fact Finding Initiative recently announced by National Defence progresses, more information and evidence to support Veterans' claims may come to light. If new information is found, all applications for disability pensions related to Agent Orange will automatically be reviewed.

### Qualifying for a disability pension

To qualify for a disability pension in relation to Agent Orange, there must be evidence that you have a medical disability related to your military service. In the case of Gagetown, it is possible you may be eligible for a disability pension if you:

- are a Veteran who served at CFB Gagetown when Agent Orange was used;
- can provide credible evidence that you were exposed to Agent Orange in a way likely to be a risk to your health; and
- have one of the medical conditions outlined by the IOM.

## Contact Us

- If you are a Veteran and you believe you have an illness related to the testing of Agent Orange at CFB Gagetown, please contact us by calling **1-866-522-2122**.
- For more information about our Department's disability pension process, visit [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca)
- For more information on the use of herbicides at CFB Gagetown from 1952 to present day, visit [www.forces.gc.ca/site/reports/defoliant/index\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/reports/defoliant/index_e.asp)
- Base Gagetown and Area Fact-Finders' Project  
Toll free: **1-866-830-9090**  
[www.basegagetownandareafactfindersproject.ca](http://www.basegagetownandareafactfindersproject.ca)

# Operational Stress Injury (OSI)

*Military-related stress has existed for centuries. Over time, it has been called many things, including "shell-shock" or "combat fatigue." In the past, many people who suffered from military-related stress did not seek help. Now, thanks to better community outreach and a broader understanding of the condition, more supports are available and more people are coming forward for help. The earlier help is sought, the better the rate of recovery.*

## What is an OSI?

An Operational Stress Injury (OSI) is any persistent psychological difficulty that results from operational duties performed while serving in the Canadian military. It includes conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The symptoms and the injuries vary depending on the individual and the nature of his or her experience. For Canadian Forces (CF) members and Veterans, the injury may occur:

- following combat duties;
- after serving in a war zone or on a peacekeeping mission; or
- as the result of other stressful events not tied to combat.

### You Said...

"When my tour was over, coming home turned out to be a very strange thing. It wasn't the same. Maybe I wasn't the same. I needed some time to adjust and to think things through. Most of it didn't make sense. Nobody knew what I was thinking about... I 'sucked it up' and pretended things were fine. But things weren't fine."

– a CF Veteran who got help through the Peer Support Network.

## Trauma

Trauma is different for everyone, but there are a number of events that may cause distress including:

- threat of death;
- serious injury;
- viewing or handling of bodies;
- death or serious injury of a close friend or colleague;
- exposure to a potentially contagious disease or toxic agent;
- witnessing human degradation; or
- action or inaction resulting in serious injury or death for others.

## Reacting to Trauma

It is normal to experience distress after being exposed to a traumatic event.

Common reactions include:

- feelings of panic or anxiety;
- avoiding anything attached to the event;
- feeling sad, tearful, hopeless, depressed, angry, or guilty;
- consuming alcohol or abuse of other substances;
- feeling a change in personality;
- difficulty concentrating, disorientation and/or memory problems;
- sleep disturbances or excessive alertness;
- being easily startled;
- trouble controlling moods, especially anger;
- difficulty with relationships;
- reliving the event (while awake or asleep); or
- intrusive thoughts about the event.

## Mental Health Strategy

VAC and National Defence have made significant progress on implementing a mental health strategy to improve access to assessment and treatment for CF members and Veterans with an operational stress injury. This strategy involves:

- a network of mental health assessment and treatment facilities;
- educational forums;
- a continuing education program; and
- research efforts.

Together, this will develop high quality, standardized mental health care for CF members and Veterans.

In this issue you will learn more about some of the strategies which are part of this initiative.

## Pension Support

At present, VAC provides more than 8,500 people with pensions for OSI disabilities. To be approved, OSI must be the result of military service and the diagnosis of OSI must be made by a qualified health professional.

## Need to Know More?

To learn more about the services and benefits now available to qualified clients through Veterans Affairs Canada please call us toll-free at **1-866-522-2122**.

To learn more about the new Veterans Charter, please call **1-800-274-9606**.

Visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca) or e-mail us at [information@vac-acc.gc.ca](mailto:information@vac-acc.gc.ca)

Courtesy of MCpl. Paz Quille, Formation Imaging Services, Halifax, 2005



# Support for the CF Community

## Support on Base

Veterans Affairs Canada helps CF members and their families on-site at many CF locations.

Every releasing Regular Force member or medically releasing Reserve Force member can take part in a VAC Transition Interview. This is an interview between the releasing CF member and a member of his or her local VAC Client Service Team (CST). During the interview a CF member receives:

- information about the full range of VAC services, benefits and programs;
- help in developing a plan to organize his/her transition from military to civilian life;
- health care information;
- contact numbers for VAC and other government departments; and
- contact numbers for community and local service providers who may be of help during or after release.

CF members are encouraged to include their family in this interview.

## Telephone Support and Referral to Community Support

### Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Assistance Service

The VAC Assistance Service provides former CF members, former RCMP members, war Veterans, and their families with access to short-term professional counselling services. If urgent support is needed, face-to-face counselling can be arranged with a professional counsellor in the individual's community. The VAC Assistance Service can be accessed 24 hours a day by calling **1-800-268-7708** or TDD **1-800-567-5803**.

### The Member Assistance Program

The Member Assistance Program is a voluntary and confidential service, initiated by the Canadian Forces, to help members and their families who have concerns that affect their personal well-being and/or work performance. The Employee Assistance Service of Health Canada provides these services. CF members or members of their family who wish to talk to a professional counsellor, or to make an appointment, can call the Member Assistance Program, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at **1-800-268-7708**.

## Peer Support

### Operational Stress Injury Social Support Program (OSISS)

OSISS is a national DND peer support network to help those suffering from operational stress injuries as a direct result of military service. This program, supported by VAC, is available to Canadian Forces (CF) members, Veterans, and

their family members. For confidential peer support call **1-800-883-6094** or visit the OSISS Web site at **www.osiss.ca**.

## Support from VAC's Health Professionals

The National Centre for Clinical Expertise located at Ste. Anne's Hospital, Ste-Anne de Bellevue (Quebec) is advancing clinical care in the field of mental health through research, education, and the development of programs. This Centre also recommends national standards and provides professional clinical leadership, program consultation and training to health professionals.

## Face-to-Face Support with a Health Professional

VAC and the Department of National Defence (DND) have a network of health care professionals who specialize in treating CF members and Veterans with OSIs.

VAC has four Operational Stress Injury clinics which provide standard assessment, treatment, prevention, and support to serving CF members and Veterans with operational stress injuries including anxiety, depression, or PTSD. Clinics are Ste. Anne's OSI Centre (Ste-Anne de Bellevue, QC); La Maison Paul Triquet OSI Clinic (Sainte-Foy, QC); Parkwood OSI Clinic (London, ON); and Deer Lodge OSI Clinic (Winnipeg, MB). Educational programs as well as individual, group, and family counselling are also available.

VAC has 900 registered community health professionals who also provide care. This number is expanding as clinical social workers are now approved to provide psychological counselling to CF members and Veterans with OSIs.

## Support to Rural or Remote Areas

In the traditional world of health care, people in rural or remote areas must often travel many miles to seek treatment and help. But thanks to a new project piloted by VAC, people who live in distant locations may be able to get help for OSIs without ever leaving their community. Right now, the project is under way in Newfoundland in partnership with the Telehealth Agency of Memorial University Medical School – TETRA. The project relies on easy-to-use video-conferencing technology to link clients with professional psychological counselling experts. As a part of the project, clients benefit from regular counselling "visits." They can also access emergency support, if needed. VAC is considering expanding this pilot to other regions.



*Trained counsellors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

## What's Next...

To build on our progress, Veterans Affairs Canada:

- is continuing to expand the number of qualified health professional available to provide care;
- will have seven Operational Stress Injury clinics open by spring 2006;
- will soon be able to provide specialized treatment services to clients with both PTSD and substance abuse or chemical dependency conditions;
- will continue to advance clinical care in the field of mental health through research, education, and the development of programs.

Veterans Affairs Canada also recently introduced a **new Veterans Charter** which provides the most sweeping changes to occur to Veterans' benefits and services since the end of the Second World War. Under the new Charter, CF members and Veterans will no longer need to qualify for a disability pension to access treatment for an OSI. It will be easier and quicker for CF members and Veterans with an OSI to obtain services.



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