

## **Backgrounder: Caring for our veterans**

(GPC Excerpt Platform Paper)

*This Paper draws material from the following background documents:*

- Retirement security; income security for persons with disabilities; our veterans
  - Vision Green: Fair and respectful policies for veterans

*The people of Canada have a contract with our service personnel and RCMP. They sign a contract of unlimited liability, meaning we can send them anywhere, anytime, into any circumstance. In the line of duty, they risk life and limb. In return, we promise to care for them and their families in the event that they suffer physical or mental injury in the line of duty. We have abdicated our responsibility to honour our half of the contract.*

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) was set up to distribute benefits and programs to returning soldiers and veterans. As a distribution network, it was tasked with making certain that all veterans in need were taken care of in a timely and effective manner. The benefit of the doubt was always given to the veteran, in the absence of irrefutable proof.

This is no longer the case. VAC is now run like a for-profit medical insurance corporation. The policy manuals are specifically tailored to initially deny applications for programs and benefits based on a maze of confusing and contradictory eligibility requirements. VAC will not tell you what programs are available. You must know beforehand what programs are available and whether you qualify. VAC has subdivided veterans into several categories and bases eligibility on where they fall in a specific category, e.g.: regular forces, RCMP, reservist, trainer, combat, admin, SarTech, technical.

**Veterans deserve our grateful and ongoing support and secure and generous pensions: the nickel-and-diming of their financial assistance by the Conservative administration is nothing short of a national disgrace. The Green Party will fund the training of service dogs for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which has been found to reduce the symptoms of PTSD in 82% of cases.**

The New Veterans Charter (NVC) in 2006 changed how veterans are paid disability and pension funds. The most onerous of these changes is the lump sum payment that was designed to save the government money at the expense of fulfilling our contractual obligations of lifetime care for those injured while in service to our country. All three national parties unanimously passed the NVC and are thus complicit in the blowback that is happening across the country. “There is only one veteran” is a rallying cry for

veterans. **The Green Party of Canada affirms that we need to see an end to categorization of veterans according to areas of service.** This is a key point of agreement among veterans' organizations.

The SISIP (Service Income Security Insurance Plan) claw back of disability payments is anathema to veterans. It is a sharp slap in the face to many disabled vets who as servicemen and women were obligated to pay into the plan. No civilian disability plan denies disability payments to employees based on income. (A veteran earning 75% of salary as pension is denied SISIP disability payments.) Disability payments must not be tied to income. Again, veterans' organizations agree that this is particularly distasteful. **The Lump Sum Payment in lieu of lifetime pension for injuries sustained on duty for Canada must be scrapped. While it saves the government tens of millions of dollars annually, it short changes veterans. The lifetime pension for injuries under the Pension Act (which preceded the NVC) must be reinstated and veterans must be provided with monthly compensation.**

The 25 member Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) currently adjudicates both new case files and files under appeal. This means the same people that initially denied claims are reviewing the appeal. **Consequently, most appeals are automatically denied.** There are currently only three members of the Board with military experience and one with medical training. The rest are appointees (most since 2007) comprised of former MPs, MLAs, Parliamentary assistants, and local supporters of the ruling party. **VRAB must become two separate panels (Veterans Review Board and Veterans Appeal Board), each comprised of qualified experts in their field.**

The Green Party was relieved to see the federal government withdraw its appeal of the favourable BC Supreme Court judgment in the "EQUITAS" legal challenge, launched in 2012 to argue that the current veteran benefits should not be much less than those received by veterans of the world wars and Korea. The federal government has promised to pass legislation confirming the obligation "to be liberally interpreted" to provide "services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or who have died as a result of military service, and this extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors or orphans."

**The Green Party will certainly be vigilant in holding the federal government to its promise to rectify the distressing inequities in income support, prior to the scheduled resumption of the EQUITAS legal challenge in 2016.**

The Green Party will reverse cuts to Veterans Affairs and re-open the offices that serve veterans' needs from coast to coast.