

Minister
of Veterans Affairs

Ministre
des Anciens Combattants

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P4

AUG 24 2016

Mr. Alistair MacGregor, MP
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. MacGregor:

Thank you for your letter regarding the support provided to those who have bravely served our country.

In last year's election, we promised Canadians a government that would uphold our sacred obligation to Veterans. That promise was reiterated in my mandate letter from the Prime Minister, and I remain committed to it.

Veterans Affairs Canada exists to serve Canadian Armed Forces members, Veterans and their families. To me, this means providing them with exemplary benefits that reflect our nation's deep gratitude for their sacrifices. It means we treat every Veteran with care, compassion and respect. It means we help every Veteran and his or her family make the sometimes difficult transition from military to civilian life. And it means that we honour every Veteran's service in a meaningful way.

My department has made great strides in doing just that. As you are no doubt aware, Budget 2016 delivered \$5.6 billion in financial security for Veterans. Specifically, we have made significant investments to increase the Earnings Loss Benefit to 90 percent of an eligible Veteran's pre-release military salary. We are also expanding access to the Permanent Impairment Allowance, to be renamed the Career Impact Allowance, and raising the value of the disability award to a maximum of \$360,000. In addition, we are hiring more front-line staff and reopening the area offices that were closed.

I consider this work to be part of our sacred obligation to Canada's Veterans, and we will continue the work to fulfill each item in my mandate letter, including the option of lifelong pensions for those who are injured in service to our country.

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As for mental illness and suicide among Veterans, I can assure you that the well-being of those who have post-traumatic stress disorder, or another operational stress injury (OSI), is a top priority for the Government of Canada. Indeed, Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence collaborate closely to provide affected Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans with the care they need. Together, the two departments have established a network of specialized clinics and a peer-based support program. The OSI clinics are now supported by the Canadian Military and Veterans Mental Health Centre of Excellence, which has broad expertise in research, clinical care and education.

Furthermore, eligible Veterans may receive coverage from Veterans Affairs Canada for treatment by a private health professional—such as a licensed psychologist—of their choice. As well, Veterans, their families and caregivers can obtain confidential, short-term counselling and referrals through the Department's 24-hour, toll-free assistance line. This service was recently expanded to cover up to 20 face-to-face sessions with a mental health professional per issue each year.

It may also interest you to know that Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence are engaged in research to gain greater insight into the mental health issues facing our military men and women, and the results will help us improve our programs for serving members, Veterans and their loved ones. And, in the coming months, I will be working with the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan, to strengthen our joint efforts to prevent suicide.

Again, thank you for writing, and I trust that the information provided is helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AL', is positioned above the typed name of the sender.

The Honourable Kent Hehr, PC, MP