



Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence For Canadian Veterans

*Keeping hope alive through Veteran-first
chronic pain research.*



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

Welcome Message



As the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence (CPCoE) for Canadian Veterans celebrates its five-year anniversary, we extend our sincere gratitude to the Veterans, researchers, healthcare professionals, partners, and staff who have supported us along the way. Your unwavering dedication and collaboration have been pivotal in advancing our mission.

Since our inception, CPCoE has remained focused on advancing research, fostering innovation, and ensuring Veterans' voices are at the heart of everything we do. With the generous support of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) we have made significant progress, funding vital research, mobilizing Veteran-focused knowledge, building strong partnerships, and improving chronic pain management for Veterans and their families.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding our impact, further strengthening collaborations, and continuing to champion the needs of Veterans and their families.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey—together, we have made a difference.

Yours truly,
Ramesh Zacharias

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The Story of CPCoE

The launch of the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans (CPCoE) was prompted by research from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), which found that Veterans were twice as likely to have chronic pain compared to the equivalent Canadian population. As a result, VAC funds the CPCoE as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the understanding of Veteran-specific chronic pain and how best to manage it.

From its inception, the CPCoE has prioritized engagement and consultation with Veterans and their families, including through an Advisory Council for Veterans (ACV), which plays a pivotal role in advising and setting research priorities, conducting studies, and sharing the results. In addition, our international Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) consists of 11 members who adjudicate research proposals to ensure funded research meets the highest standards.

Since 2020, the CPCoE has funded over 70 research projects, fostered strategic partnerships, built a network of pain clinics, and advanced evidence-based decision-making. Through dedicated leadership and a commitment to Veteran engagement, the CPCoE continues to drive impactful research that aims to improve the well-being of Veterans, and their families, living with chronic pain.

Our Mission Vision & Values

Mission

Enable knowledge that is Veteran informed, raising awareness of the unique circumstances of Veterans and mobilizing information to influence policies and programs that impact our Veterans and their families.

Vision

Improved well-being of service members, Veterans, and their families, living with chronic pain.

Values

Respect
Diversity
Teamwork
Integrity



Veteran Engagement

At the core of all CPCoE activities is the principle of Veteran engagement. Consultation and engagement with Veterans began prior to establishing the organization and continues as a lasting priority.

Advisory Council for Veterans

The CPCoE Advisory Council for Veterans (ACV) is made up of 15 members from across Canada who provide us with a deeper understanding of the experiences of Veterans living with chronic pain.

The ACV shapes all of our research priorities, offers guidance on how to best engage with Veterans and families, and supports researchers and clinicians in their work with Veterans and families.

The CPCoE wishes to extend sincere thanks to all ACV members for their time and dedication in supporting the CPCoE and the Veteran community.



Testimonials from the Advisory Council for Veterans



Conrad Heegsma

Member, CPCoE Advisory Council for Veterans

Being a part of CPCoE has changed my life. Coming to CPCoE events is the highlight of my year.



Hélène Le Scelleur

Vice Chair, CPCoE Advisory Council for Veterans

I'm proud of the team we've built on the ACV. We're growing strong, driving real change, and doing things differently—that's what true leadership looks like.



Veteran Engagement Plan

In 2023, the CPCoE launched a comprehensive, multi-year Veteran Engagement Plan to advance the definition, guiding principles, roles, and support mechanisms for Veteran engagement.

This Plan embeds meaningful Veteran Engagement across the entire research cycle: from setting initial research priorities, to educating and facilitating connections between Veterans and researchers, and finally to disseminating research and Knowledge Mobilization through Veteran ambassadorship.

Engaging Veterans in developing research priorities

The CPCoE develops its research priorities by soliciting research topics directly from Veterans, and their families, living with chronic pain. The most recent Priority Setting Process (PSP), adapted from the James Lind Alliance, ensured that research undertaken by the CPCoE was informed directly by Veterans as well as clinicians, by gathering issues of relevance which were then ranked in terms of priority by the ACV. Looking ahead, the CPCoE aims to establish a new set of priorities in 2025 by completing an official James Lind Alliance PSP.

For full details, visit our website: veteranschronicpain.ca/research#priorities

Veteran Partner Database

In consultation with Veterans and researchers, the CPCoE co-developed a new Veteran Engagement Database to facilitate connections between Veterans and researchers interested in partnering together in research.

This database is free for Veterans and researchers to join. It is available in English and French.

Further information can be found here:



Veteran Intake Form



Researcher Intake Form

Veteran Engagement Education


The CPCoE co-developed and co-designed new educational modules with a working group of ACV members. These modules aim to improve cultural competence and understanding between Veteran and researcher communities and promote meaningful patient engagement.

All modules are free of charge, accessible, and available in a self-directed format online in English and French. Certificates of completion are provided.


Scan the QR code more information on Veteran Engagement Education.




Roles Veterans Can Serve in Research




Providing insights about living with chronic pain that may validate or change the direction of the research.




Co-developing questionnaires or interview guides for participants in the research project.




Reviewing and participating in discussions around the analysis and findings from the study.



Co-designing, reviewing, and commenting on research protocols.



Providing a Veteran's perspective, feedback, and insights into tools and resources that are being planned or developed.



Partnering in regular research team meetings to provide feedback or insights on the project.



Supporting knowledge translation planning and sharing research results with key audiences.



Advancing Knowledge

Innovative Research with Real-World **IMPACT**

Over the past five years, the CPCoE has been a driving force in advancing knowledge about chronic pain, focusing specifically on the unique experiences of Canadian Veterans. Through innovative studies and collaborative partnerships, our research has generated new insights about Veterans' health, deepened understanding of care models, and provided evidence to inform policymaking.

76 FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

45 COMPLETED RESEARCH PROJECTS

28 PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

30 UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Building Capacity For Research

Growing the Future of Veteran-Focused Chronic Pain Research

This map highlights universities and research institutions across Canada and Australia where the CPCoE has supported collaborative research projects through funding.



Attracting Graduate Students

10 Capacity Building Initiatives funded in the last five years

The CPCoE created its Capacity Building Initiatives (CBI) to support master's and doctoral students conducting research related to Veterans' chronic pain. This investment in generating Veteran-focused evidence will help to deepen the field and support the next generation of researchers committed to advancing this important work.

Postdoctoral Fellowship with CPS

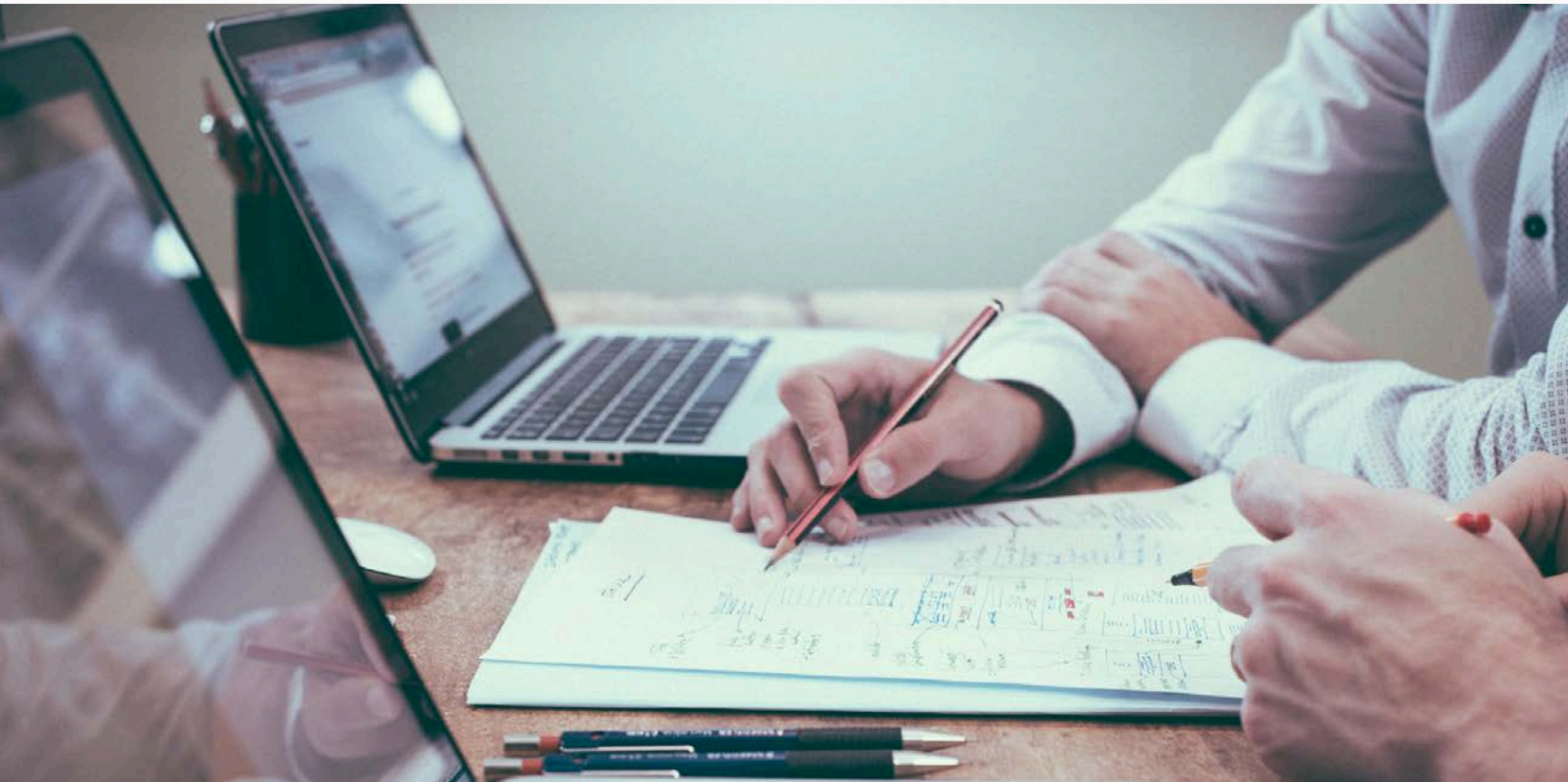
The Canadian Pain Society (CPS) and the CPCoE have partnered together to offer funding for a Postdoctoral fellowship focused on clinical or health policy research that is relevant to Veterans living with chronic pain. The purpose of this fellowship is to support postdoctoral trainees whose research is important to Veterans suffering from chronic pain, as they begin their research careers.



A founding member of the Advisory Council for Veterans, **François Dupéré**, passed away on January 20, 2021. To preserve his legacy as an advocate for resiliency within the Veterans' community, the CPCoE established a specific CBI in his honour to fund the work of a new Francophone Master's student every year. This initiative will contribute to the valuable research on chronic pain and ensure François' legacy will positively impact generations to come.



Research Highlights



In our ongoing efforts to improve the well-being and care of Veterans, we are proud to showcase a selection of research projects conducted by independent researchers at academic institutions across Canada who have been funded by the CPCoE.

You can visit the resources page on our website to explore research summaries, videos, infographics, and publications related to these studies.

www.veteranschronicpain.ca/knowledge-mobilization

Medical Cannabis and Chronic Pain

Helping Clinicians and Patients Make Informed Decisions about Medical Cannabis

Researchers at McMaster University conducted a large review of studies to understand whether medical cannabis can help people with chronic pain.

What did they find?

- Non-inhaled cannabis products may provide small improvements in pain, sleep, and physical function.
- However, these benefits come with possible side effects, such as dizziness and trouble concentrating.

As a result, a clinical guideline was developed to help healthcare providers and patients make informed choices.

Enhancing Veteran Access to Medical Cannabis Education

Researchers at the University of Waterloo worked with Veterans living with chronic pain to find the best self-education tools related to medical cannabis.

The project led to the creation of a practical guide, featuring podcasts, recipes, apps, courses, research articles and more.

By aligning educational resources with unique health needs to Veterans, this work enhances informed decision-making and promotes better health outcomes for those using cannabis to manage pain.



A Deeper Dive into Sex and Gender in Veteran Research

What are we learning about sex and gender considerations in Veteran health research?

Researchers at Western University reviewed 20 years of Veteran-focused studies on rehabilitation and opioid treatments for pain and found minimal consideration of sex or gender in the studies' designs or reported treatment outcomes.

This means that the results of these studies may not be applicable to all Veterans. The research highlights the importance of implementing and adhering to guidelines that encourage consideration of sex and gender in Veteran research.



**Dr., Major (Ret'd) Luc J. Hébert and
Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur**

Natural language processing to analyze clinician notes

In an analysis of clinician notes on Veterans by researchers at Lawson Research Institute, 'pain' was mentioned twice as often in notes for women compared to men, while 'chronic' appeared more frequently in notes for men compared to women. Anecdotes from women Veterans revealed that their pain was not considered seriously.

These findings suggest potential gender differences in how chronic pain is documented by clinicians or reported by Veterans, which could impact diagnoses and treatments plans.

A deeper analysis is needed to understand these gender-based disparities in clinician notes regarding Veteran chronic pain.

Families and Community

Military families and pain experiences

Researchers at the University of Calgary identified that military training, culture, and identity play an important role in Veteran families' experiences of pain.

Immediate family members may adopt a military mindset of concealing pain and emotions, which can impact how parents respond to children's pain as well as how the children express pain. This research shows that children acknowledge there is a link between their physical pain, mental pain, and childhood trauma.

Veterans and their families can break this cycle and shift their military mindset by seeking help for health issues and harnessing their resilience to navigate through pain experiences.

Results from this research can inform the development of pain treatments and programs that are tailored for Veteran families.



What else are we learning through research?

Developing research infrastructure that is essential to Veterans' health

Researchers at Queen's University are mapping the availability of Veterans' health data across Canada.

We're learning about gaps where Veteran identifiers do not exist in certain provinces and territories, which limits researchers' ability to link Veteran status to important data such as health service use, treatments, and health outcomes.

Exercise for Veterans with OSI/PTSD and Chronic Pain

Through research conducted at Western University, we are learning about barriers and facilitators to exercise among Veterans with operational stress injuries, PTSD and chronic pain.

Researchers are working on developing a decision aid to support Veterans in choosing the most appropriate physical activity or exercise for their physical and mental health.

Identifying Patients with Pain within Primary Care

Machine learning could be better at picking up on subtle mentions of chronic pain in the free-text notes of doctors. Chronic pain can be hard to identify because it might not always be recorded in a structured way in patient records.

Through research conducted at ICES, we're learning whether advanced algorithms are effective in identifying patients with chronic pain within primary care electronic medical records (EMR). If successful, this approach could improve how EMRs at different sites identify patients with chronic pain, leading to better care.



Yoga for Veterans

We created a pamphlet for clinicians to share with Veteran patients to inform them about yoga therapy and why it is included in interdisciplinary pain programs.

Research funded by the CPCoE showed that yoga therapy can be beneficial for Veterans living with chronic pain. Some benefits reported by Veterans include moving with more ease, gaining control over pain during movement and at rest, reduced stress, better sleep, and improved ability to focus and concentrate. Yoga therapy is different than community yoga classes as it focuses on therapeutic goals and the instructors are trauma-informed and knowledgeable about pain science and pain care.

What we have learned about mental health comorbidities associated with chronic pain

Research continues to examine the common co-occurrence of pain and mental health conditions among Veterans.

Research funded by the CPCoE and conducted at Lawson Research Institute suggests that Veterans and CAF members seeking mental health treatment for PTSD and depression may also experience higher levels of pain. These findings may guide clinical intake procedures to ensure both pain and mental health symptoms are assessed concurrently.

Identifying Reliable Ways to Measure Veteran Well-Being

The CPCoE collaborated with researchers to find out what tools, scales or questionnaires exist to measure Veteran well-being in each of the seven domains described by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

Reliable tools are important for assessing the needs of Veterans during their transitions to civilian life, as well as for the development and evaluation of programs and services.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE VETERAN WELL-BEING?

Access the Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory and find surveys, questionnaires and scales to measure well-being:
atlasveterans.ca/well-being-measurement

The Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory supports vital research on the quality of life for Canadian Veterans.

Scan the QR code to access the Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory:



atlasveterans.ca/well-being-measurement

Developed in collaboration between:

 ATLAS INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES

 Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans



There are several existing tools to assess different aspects of well-being, but only a handful have been tested among Veterans. More research is needed to identify, adapt or develop tools that are applicable to Veterans and designed to provide a complete picture of their well-being.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Over the past five years, the CPCoE has partnered or collaborated with the following organizations and groups to build mutually beneficial relationships that advance our shared missions:



**Canadian Institute
for Military and
Veteran Health
Research (CIMVHR)**



**Atlas Institute for
Veterans and
Families**



**Canadian Pain
Society**



Pain BC



**Quebec Pain
Research
Network QPRN**



**Pepper
Pod**



**Power over
Pain Portal**



**Actim
Health**



**Honour
House**



**RCMP Veteran's
Association**



**Royal Canadian
Legion**



**Office of
Veterans Affairs
England**



Bayshore Health



HEALTH FORUM

**McMaster
Health Forum**



Strengthening Knowledge Mobilization (KM) through Collaboration

The CPCoE is a proud member of Research Impact Canada (RIC), a national network of institutions dedicated to maximizing the impact of research. This vibrant community has connected us with KM professionals across Canada and internationally, and provided our staff, researchers and partners with tailored KM training and resources.



In 2024, several funded researchers completed RIC's MobilizeU course, leading to measurable improvements in how they apply KM principles. Our KM team actively contributes to the network and has presented at events including the Canadian Knowledge Mobilization Forum and monthly RIC meetings.

Our membership with RIC reflects the CPCoE's ongoing commitment to understanding, measuring and communicating the impact of our funded research.



Kayla May and Deb Denman present at the 2024 RIC Annual Meeting.

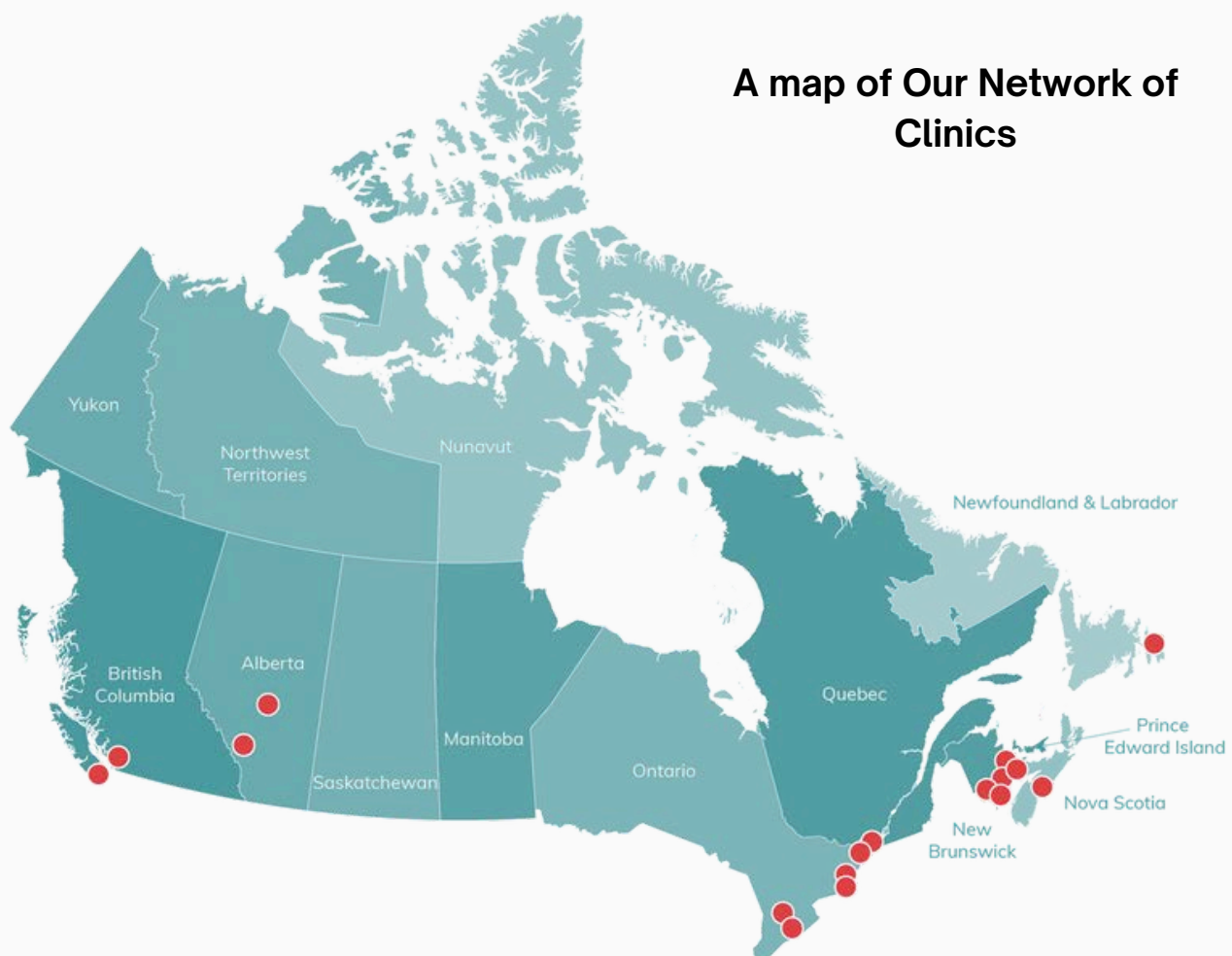
A Network of Interdisciplinary Pain Clinics

Our Knowledge Mobilization Champion Group connects clinicians, researchers, and Veterans to enhance Veteran-focused pain care. Meeting on a bimonthly basis, clinicians from interdisciplinary pain clinics across Canada engage with CPCoE-funded researchers to discuss best practices and the latest research findings.

Veterans also participate in Champion Group meetings, offering their lived experiences to provide context to the research and enhance its clinical relevance.

Due to growing interest, the group continues to expand, serving as an essential medium for knowledge transfer and is a critical component of CPCoE's knowledge mobilization strategy.

A map of Our Network of Clinics



Informing Policy and Practice

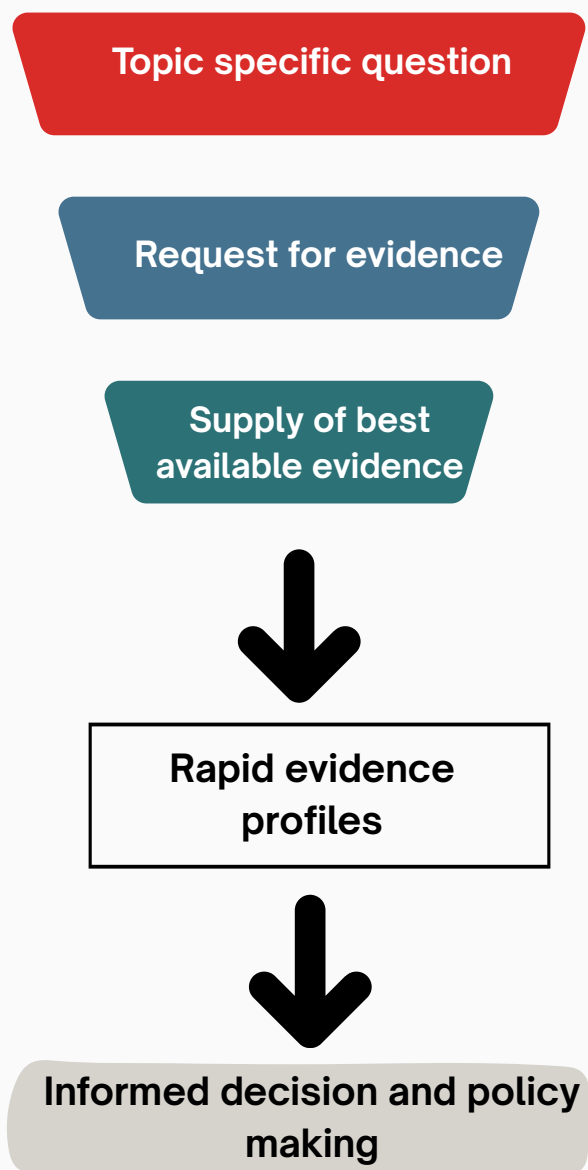
An Evidence Support Mechanism

The CPCoE has made a significant effort to inform policy and practice by leading the development of an Evidence Support Mechanism. This is a collaboration between the CPCoE and:

- McMaster Health Forum
- The Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families
- The Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR)
- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)
- Canadian Armed Forces/Department of National Defense

Through this mechanism, rapid evidence profiles are produced to address specific research questions. The work provides opportunities for decision makers at the federal level to consider policy decisions that are grounded in evidence. To date, there have been 19 rapid evidence profiles completed. All profiles are on the McMaster Health Forum website.

www.mcmasterforum.org/about-us/products



Communication Tool for Clinicians



A Communication Tool for Clinicians Working with Veterans

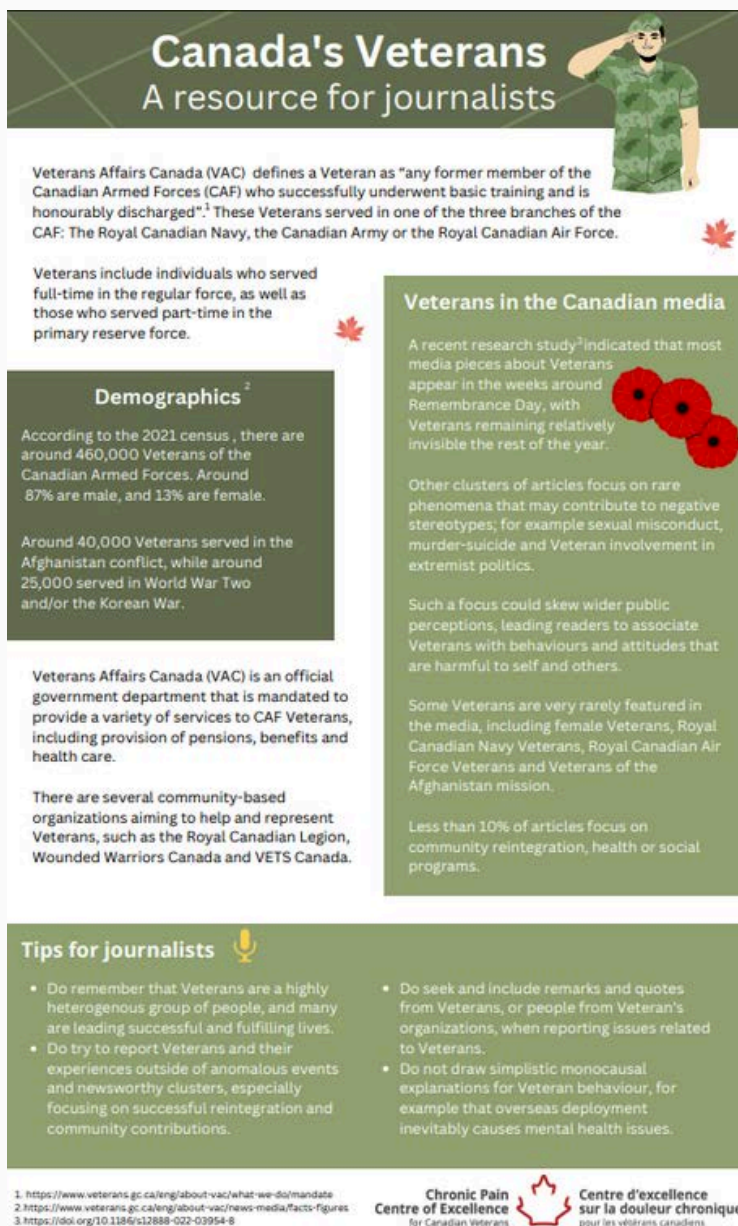
Veterans' Chronic Pain, Mental Health, and the Patient-Provider Relationship

In partnership with Veterans, the CPCoE developed a tool for clinicians to help them better understand Veterans as patients and equip them with a series of prompts they may use to enhance communication in the patient-provider relationship.



Scan the QR code to access the tool

Resources for Journalists



Canada's Veterans

A resource for journalists

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) defines a Veteran as "any former member of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) who successfully underwent basic training and is honourably discharged".¹ These Veterans served in one of the three branches of the CAF: The Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army or the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Veterans include individuals who served full-time in the regular force, as well as those who served part-time in the primary reserve force.

Demographics²

According to the 2021 census, there are around 460,000 Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces. Around 87% are male, and 13% are female.

Around 40,000 Veterans served in the Afghanistan conflict, while around 25,000 served in World War Two and/or the Korean War.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is an official government department that is mandated to provide a variety of services to CAF Veterans, including provision of pensions, benefits and health care.

There are several community-based organizations aiming to help and represent Veterans, such as the Royal Canadian Legion, Wounded Warriors Canada and VETS Canada.

Veterans in the Canadian media

A recent research study³ indicated that most media pieces about Veterans appear in the weeks around Remembrance Day, with Veterans remaining relatively invisible the rest of the year.

Other clusters of articles focus on rare phenomena that may contribute to negative stereotypes; for example sexual misconduct, murder-suicide and Veteran involvement in extremist politics.

Such a focus could skew wider public perceptions, leading readers to associate Veterans with behaviours and attitudes that are harmful to self and others.

Some Veterans are very rarely featured in the media, including female Veterans, Royal Canadian Navy Veterans, Royal Canadian Air Force Veterans and Veterans of the Afghanistan mission.

Less than 10% of articles focus on community reintegration, health or social programs.

Tips for journalists

- Do remember that Veterans are a highly heterogeneous group of people, and many are leading successful and fulfilling lives.
- Do try to report Veterans and their experiences outside of anomalous events and newsworthy clusters, especially focusing on successful reintegration and community contributions.
- Do seek and include remarks and quotes from Veterans, or people from Veteran's organizations, when reporting issues related to Veterans.
- Do not draw simplistic monocausal explanations for Veteran behaviour, for example that overseas deployment inevitably causes mental health issues.

1. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/what-we-do/mandate>
2. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/facts-figures>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-03954-8>

Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence
for Canadian Veterans

Centre d'excellence sur la douleur chronique
pour les vétérans canadiens

In an analysis of Canadian news media pieces that covered Veterans' transition to civilian life, the common themes that emerged were social integration, PTSD, suicide, and employment and housing issues.

Canadian mainstream media focused more on mental health issues and incidents, while specialist military media covered more practical elements of transition.

There is a need for better educational resources for journalists and news editors to improve reporting on Veterans.

To address this, researchers have created

- An information sheet for journalists.
- A self-directed Veteran journalism course for journalism students.

Educational Initiatives

Military Veteran Alpine Challenge



The Military Veteran Alpine Challenge or MVAC, organized by the CPCoE, is an annual event that raises awareness about chronic pain among Veterans and provides participants with tools and support necessary to manage their condition effectively. Through education and guided preparation, the initiative culminates in a challenging alpine hike, empowering Veterans to apply what they've learned and fostering a renewed sense of purpose and personal achievement.



**First MVAC
August 27, 2022**

- 13 participants
- 8 Veterans



**Second MVAC
August 19, 2023**

- 12 participants
- 9 Veterans



**Third MVAC
August 24, 2024**

- 10 participants
- 9 Veterans



Addressing a Critical Need

MVAC addresses issues by offering Veterans a structured program that combines physical activity with educational resources, aiming to improve their quality of life and overall well-being.

Comprehensive Preparation and Support

A distinguishing feature of MVAC is the comprehensive preparation provided to participants. Leading up to the event, Veterans engage in training sessions that focus on safe movement, nutrition, and chronic pain management strategies. This holistic approach ensures that participants are well-equipped to undertake the challenge and apply the skills learned to their daily lives, fostering long-term benefits.

Fostering Camaraderie and Purpose

Beyond the physical aspects, MVAC emphasizes the importance of camaraderie and shared experiences. Participants often report a renewed sense of purpose and connection, reminiscent of their time in service. This support network is crucial in helping Veterans navigate the complexities of chronic pain and reinforces the event's role in promoting mental and emotional well-being.

Looking Ahead

Plans for future events include the addition of resources for participants and the standardization of the MVAC program in the form of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to make this initiative a lasting one and be carried out in different provinces across Canada. In addition, a research component will be introduced to measure the impact of this activity on Veterans' well-being and quality of life.

The Most Painful Podcast

Le balado le plus douloureux



The Most Painful Podcast, hosted by Veteran Tom Hoppe, offers evidence-based insights and discussions on topics like using cannabis or psychedelics for pain management or the intersection of military identity and professional athletics. With 49 episodes and over 14,000 downloads, the podcast has become an invaluable resource for Veterans, clinicians, researchers, and anyone impacted by chronic pain.

Le Balado Le Plus Douloureux, the French-language companion podcast, launched on April 26, 2023, offers the same vital insights to the French-speaking community. Led by Veteran Luc J. Hébert, with 10 episodes and 486 downloads, the podcast has reached an international audience, continuing to support Veterans and their families while contributing to a broader, more inclusive understanding of chronic pain.

Educational Webinars

The CPCoE is committed to fostering education and knowledge-sharing to enhance the understanding of chronic pain experienced by Canadian Veterans. Through a series of educational webinars, we provide Veterans, their families, healthcare professionals, and researchers with access to evidence-based information on chronic pain management and the latest advancements in care.

Topics

- Female Veterans
- Mental Health
- Mindfulness
- Psychedelics
- Families
- Military Identity
- Canadian Pain Landscape
- Interdisciplinary Care
- Pain Management

Audiences

- Veterans and Families
- Caregivers
- Healthcare Providers
- Researchers
- VAC Case Managers
- Collaborating Institutions

Impact and Outcomes

Attendees have reported increased knowledge of chronic pain management strategies, a greater understanding of the connection between chronic pain and mental health, and a strengthened sense of community within the Veteran population. These sessions not only provide valuable information but also empower participants to become advocates for their own care and for broader systemic change.

Annual Workshops Overview

HAMILTON, ONTARIO

First workshop were held in Hamilton, Ontario in 2021 with 57 attendees.



MONTREAL, QUEBEC

The second Annual Workshop was held in Montreal, Quebec in 2022, with 93 attendees.



VANCOUVER, BC

The third Annual Workshop took place in Vancouver, British Columbia in 2023, drawing 105 attendees.



HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

The fourth Annual Workshop was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2024, with 112 attendees.



Contact Information

**Website**

www.veteranschronicpain.ca

**Instagram**

[@chronicpain_coe](https://www.instagram.com/chronicpain_coe)

**Twitter**

[@chronicpainCOE](https://twitter.com/chronicpainCOE)



**Chronic Pain Centre of
Excellence**



**Chronic Pain Centre of
Excellence**

**Address**

413A- 175 Longwood Rd
Hamilton, ON L8P0A1

**Phone Number**

1-833-644-4673

**Email**

info@vcp-vdc.ca