

ADVOCACY SUPPORT FOR RCMP VETERANS

My name is James Brown, I am a member of the RCMP Veteran's National Board. I have been tasked with assimilating information to Veterans and soon to be Veterans to receive the supports and benefits that they require to enhance their well-being during retirement. Through a series of papers and information guides I will endeavour to make the experience of applying and finding help more expedient and functional. Several of the Divisions are well advanced in the way they aid members and guide their way through the processes, to improve their quality of life during their retirement. The Support and Advocacy Committee of the RCMP Nova Scotia Veteran's Association was formed in 2011. They have many links provided in their newsletter to assist members who are trying to obtain assistance in receiving the supports and benefits they are entitled to in their retirement. Many members are not aware or feel they are not entitled to these benefits.

From my own experience one of the most beneficial and overlooked avenues of help is the **Veteran's Affairs Canada (VAC)** disability and allowance. Personally, I experienced a very onerous application process to receive entitled benefits. I started the application process without the assistance of VAC and the Legion and got nowhere. Appeal after appeal was denied. Once linked with VAC and the Legion Service Officer, the process was expediated, I was able to obtain benefits and supports for hearing loss and injuries received while on duty.

Canada Revenue Agency Disability Tax Credit applications and income tax medical deductions is another often overlooked benefit to retired members. Do you know that the recently received \$600 received in \$300 increments from the Federal Government during the COVID Pandemic is totally tax free to Veterans?

Are you aware that referrals to Medical Professionals such as Audiologists and Psychologists are readily available through a successful application to VAC?

These are just a few examples of often overlooked supports and benefits to RCMP Veterans. In the upcoming months, I will be including a series of topics of interest to RCMP Veterans.

My first topic of interest is PTSD. It will be followed by the topics of depression, nutrition, and benefits of regular exercise. I will be working with the assistance of my wife Carol Brown who is a Nurse Practitioner, Registered Mental Health Nurse and Master of Nursing.

PTSD

*"Our memories exist in part to protect us in the future. So, there is biological wisdom in not being able to forget our most emotional or traumatic experiences-our greatest embarrassments, our worst accidents, our most horrid experiences. But sometimes for some of us, the unforgettable takes over our lives. The complaints of battle-scarred veterans ... recurring haunting memories and nightmares, numbed social withdrawal, jumpy anxiety, and insomnia—are typical of what once was called "shellshock" or "battle fatigue" and is now called **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.*¹

¹ Hoge, C.W., Castro, C.A., C.A. Messer, S.C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D.I., & Koffman, R.L., (2004), Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *New England journal of Medicine*, 351, 13– 22 (p. 613)

PTSD does not just exist with battle scared war Veterans even though those individuals are the most exemplified with this condition. They have lived through warzones which include death and horrible experiences. Policing in many circumstances can be equally damaging to the psyche of an individual. Throughout our careers we experience many horrific events. The general tendency is to say that did not bother me; it was part of the job. Our subconscious mind may relate to this differently We may not be aware of how exposure to these traumatic instances have affected our wellbeing.

I have spoken to veterans who when questioned say they have no problems with this issue. Then when pressed as to whether they dream of chasing or arresting people they indicated that yes, they have. The issue here is that trauma and devastating experiences tend to bury themselves in our sub-conscious minds. On the surface everything is fine but sub-consciously we harbour experiences especially traumatic experiences. This is more the situation for those members who have worked in rural and contract provinces. Motor vehicle accidents, homicides, suicides and even assaults may take their toll on our subconscious minds. We in policing put on a brave exterior face to show we are not weak or vulnerable. This may be fine for that present moment but how can this cause damage to us later in life? *“People with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffer from unintentional intrusive and distressing memories of the traumatic event.”*² PTSD can manifest in a number of ways, from depression to suicide. The present circumstances, the conditions with the COVID-19 Virus make the potential of PTSD even more prevalent. PTSD symptoms are as follows:

- Flashbacks, in which the individual relives the event
- Constricted ability to feel emotion, often reported as feeling numb resulting in the inability to experience happiness, sexual desire, or enjoyable interpersonal relationships
- Excessive arousal, resulting in exaggerated startle response, or ability to sleep
- Difficulties with memory or concentration
- Feelings of apprehension, including nervous tremors
- Impulsive outbursts of behaviour, such as aggressiveness, or sudden changes in lifestyle³

Overall, approximately 8 percent of men and 20 percent of women go on to develop PTSD, and about 30 percent of these individuals develop a chronic form that persists through their lifetimes. The course of PTSD typically involves periods of symptom increase followed by remission or decrease, although for some individuals the symptoms may be unremitting and severe. Ordinary events can serve as reminders of the trauma and trigger flashback or intrusive images⁴. This basically means that the individual who has experienced a horrific event can block it but that it can surface again much later in life with devastating effects. We as members believe we are a tough bunch and impervious to these types of events. This is not the case though. We are in fact vulnerable and the older we get the more this is true. The fact is that symptoms of PTSD may not surface until later in life. The key is to be able to identify and seek help.

² Sabine Schönfeld^{1,2} and Anke Ehlers^{1,3,4} 1 King's College London; 2 University of Dresden; 3 Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford; and 4 Oxford NIHR Cognitive Health Clinical Research Facility

³ John W. Santrock, John O. Mitterer., Psychology 2, Canadian Edition (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2004) pg. 510.

⁴ Santrock, 510.

If you feel that you might have some of the symptoms in the above narrative for PTSD, I have catalogued below a list of resources that are available through the RCMP Veteran's Association, to assist you in seeking help.

ASSOCIATION CHIEF ADVOCATE

Ruby Burns

Director of Advocates

902-894-4693

Cell: 902-330-5950 VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA

Sgt. Kim Hendricken

DVA Liaison Officer

902-370-4908

Cell:902-393-8388

Or Links to Division Advocates:

<https://rcmpva.org/advocates-en/>

• Further reference for assistance would be to refer to the *Advocate's Manual RCMP Veteran's Association*. <https://rcmpva.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Advocates-Manual-06-FEB-2020.pdf> and the *Veterans Benefits Guide* <https://rcmpva.org/wp->

[content/uploads/2019/07/VeteransBenefitsGuide2019_Eng.pdf](https://rcmpva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/VeteransBenefitsGuide2019_Eng.pdf)

• If members wish to contact the Legion directly, they should follow: <https://legion.ca/support->

[for-veterans/mental-health-ptsd](https://legion.ca/support-for-veterans/mental-health-ptsd) This link will provide contact numbers and procedures to seek help. It is imperative that members who are in distress have the means to be able to seek help. The Legion numbers are:

- Phone: 1-800-268-7708
- For the hearing impaired, dial 1-800-567-5803 (TDD)

The Legion advocate will deal with individuals in a completely confidential manner. They can get benefits and support we may not be able to obtain. You meet with one of their Advocates who will go over your claim confidentially and then work with Veteran's Affairs on your behalf. Veteran members can also reach out to their Division Advocates for support and assistance in obtaining entitled benefits. (Please find the Veteran's Advocates <https://rcmpva.org/advocates-en/>)

These are dedicated Advocates who do nothing but work on the behalf of claimants. Many of our members are missing out because they have not tried or were aware that this was available to them. If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms it is imperative that you seek help either with a local advocate or the Legion. This is critical for your well-being and that of you family. Your family has stood by you for your career please do not place an unnecessary burden on them by ignoring problems you may have.

If you are considering requesting assistance for application to The Veterans Association for help with PTSD, there are avenues to explore and people available to help with the process. Be aware that all information that you disclose will be kept strictly confidential. You can find the necessary links from the Nova Scotia Division Support and Advocacy:

https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/e_services/register

Guide to Application Process for Veteran Affairs Canada (VAC) PTSD and other Mental Health Disabilities Pensions and VAC Application Guide to PTSD and other Mental Health Disabilities. Both applications are made via **My VAC Account** <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng> .

It is important prior to retirement that estate planning is a priority for members. Assistance can be obtained through Association Support groups. For family and spouse's bereavement support it is available through Association Support groups for those who have "little knowledge of residual pension payments following the death of the Pensioner." Taken from the RCMP Nova Scotia Veterans' Association."

We will continue to provide information to help and guide Veteran Members.

Remember during COVID to wash your hands frequently, social distance, mask properly and seek immunization as soon as it is available in your respective areas. Seniors will be a priority.

James A. Brown M.A.
705-786-0222
Cell 705-878-6898

Carol Brown, NP, MN.