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# A SNAPSHOT OF

## MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES IN CANADA





The Vanier Institute of the Family is a national, independent, charitable organization dedicated to understanding the diversity and complexity of families and the reality of family life in Canada. The Vanier Institute offers access to a range of publications, research initiatives, presentations and social media content to enhance the national understanding of how families interact with, have an impact on and are affected by social, economic, environmental and cultural forces.

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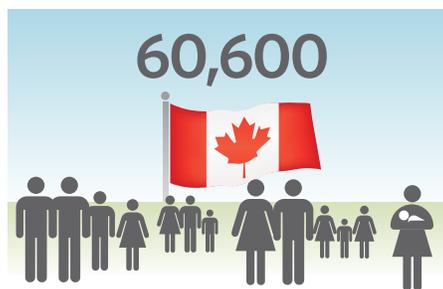
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Canada's military and Veteran families are diverse, resilient and strong, and they are a source of pride for the country. They engage *with* – and play important roles *in* – their workplaces, communities and society as a whole.

Approximately nine in 10 military families (85%) live in civilian communities,<sup>1</sup> where they **access and rely on the same variety of programs and services as civilians**, including (but not limited to) child care and eldercare, health and mental health, community recreation and leisure, education and employment. As such, these programs and services are typically delivered by *civilian* professionals and practitioners, who **often have little awareness of military life stressors and their impact on spouses and children**.<sup>2</sup>

The “military journey” is often characterized by **mobility, absence and the risk of illness, injury or death**. Professionals and practitioners can benefit from military literacy and an understanding of the unique experiences and lifestyle characteristics of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel, Veterans and their families.



In 2017, there were approximately 60,600 CAF Regular and Reserve Force **military families**<sup>3</sup> in Canada and overseas (42,500 **Regular Force** families and 18,000 **Reserve Force** families).<sup>4</sup>

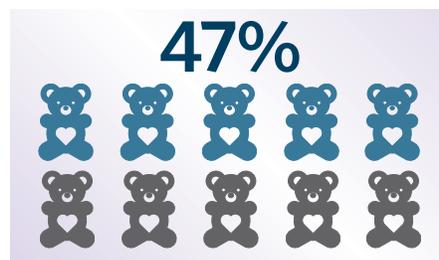
Most (96%, or approximately 58,400) of these families were **posted in Canada** (40,200 Regular Force families and 17,900 Reserve Force families).<sup>5</sup>

In 2017, the **military family population** in Canada totalled more than 190,600 people.<sup>6</sup>

- 58,200 CAF **personnel**
- 49,400 CAF **partners**
- 78,000 **children** under 18<sup>7</sup>
- 5,000 **other dependants** (dependent parents, siblings, grandchildren, nieces/nephews, etc.)



As of March 2018, there were approximately 601,000 **CAF Veterans** in Canada.<sup>8</sup>



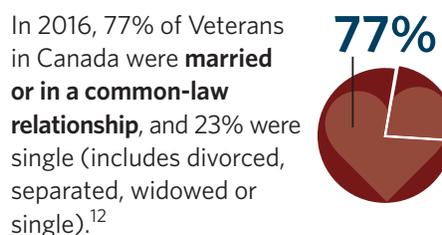
Almost half (47%) of *all* Regular Force members **have children under 18** (75% of couples and 20% of single CAF members).<sup>9</sup>



In 2016, approximately 30% of **Veterans** in Canada had **children** under 18.<sup>10</sup>



Most CAF members are **in a committed relationship**, with 56% reporting in 2017 that they were **married or in common-law relationships**, and 44% reporting that they were single (includes divorced, separated, widowed or single).<sup>11</sup>



In 2016, 77% of Veterans in Canada were **married or in a common-law relationship**, and 23% were single (includes divorced, separated, widowed or single).<sup>12</sup>

**The vast majority of military and Veteran families now live in civilian communities**

In the mid-1990s, 80% of military families in Canada lived on a base, where they have ready access to support from Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs). **MFRCs offer “military literate” programs and services** that support a variety of aspects of family life, such as child care, family caregiving, employment, education and mental health support. By the mid-2010s, this had fallen to only 15%,<sup>13,14</sup> though, in 2016, 83% of military spouses indicated that they **live within a 30-minute drive to a base**.<sup>15</sup>



In 2018, 71% of surveyed CAF members said that they *chose* to live off base for their last relocation, citing as the top two reasons that they **wanted to own (or already owned) their own home** and that they **preferred to live in the civilian community**. However, one-quarter said they would prefer military housing.<sup>16</sup>

**Canada's military and Veteran families are diverse, resilient and strong, and they are a source of pride for the country.**



**Many military families experience high mobility and frequent separation**

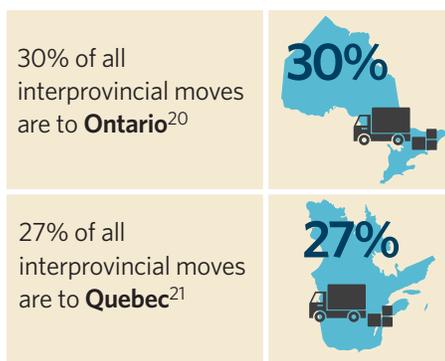
Military families experience **frequent moves**, with little say in when or where they will be posted, nor the length of time they will spend at each location. With each new posting, these families often must establish new community ties and “get in line” to access community resources. Military family members have reported in multiple studies that the **most challenging aspects of life to re-establish** after relocation are **medical services, a social support network** and **non-military spousal employment**.<sup>17</sup>

Moving across provinces can have a significant impact on families, since many essential services fall under provincial jurisdiction such as health care, education and child care. This is reflected in a 2013 survey that found non-military spouses identifying **relocations** as the **highest overall challenge for military families**.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the reality of **deployments** means that CAF personnel often experience **more frequent periods of separation** from their families compared with other families in Canada.



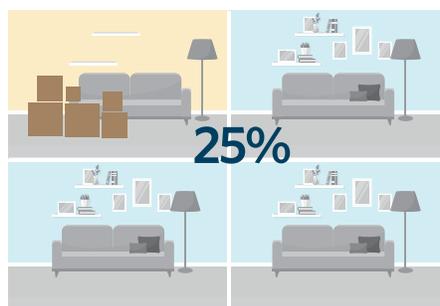
**Every year** in Canada, an estimated 10,000 military **families are relocated** due to postings, 8,000 of whom move to **new provinces**.<sup>19</sup>



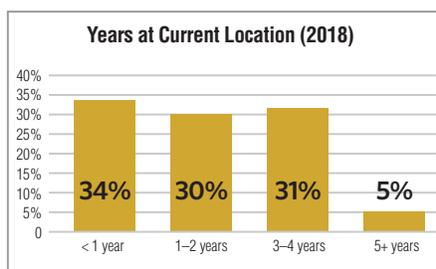
**Military families experience frequent moves, with little say in when or where they will be posted, nor the length of time they will spend at each location.**



In 2018, among surveyed CAF Regular Force members, more than one-third (34%) reported that they had **relocated at least four times** due to military postings throughout their career.<sup>22</sup>



Each year, an estimated **one-quarter of all Regular Forces** personnel in Canada relocate.<sup>23, 24</sup>



Source: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (May 2018).



In 2016, 41% of surveyed CAF personnel reported having been **deployed in the past three years**, and 14% had **returned from a deployment in the past year**. The average deployment was **3.9 months**.<sup>25</sup>

In 2016, an estimated 10% of all CAF members **provided care to elderly parents or disabled adult family members** – nearly eight in 10 (77%) of whom were **also caring for their children**.<sup>26</sup>



21% of surveyed Regular Forces personnel who provided care to an elderly parent said **it affected their family's ability to deal with the deployment**.<sup>27</sup>

**Military children are affected by relocations, but they are resilient and most adjust quickly**

Research shows that while most **military children do find relocation stressful** (particularly among adolescents, for whom peer relationships play a more significant role in their identity and social support network), they are **resilient** and this stress typically **diminishes within a half-year** after moving.<sup>28</sup>



In 2016, among surveyed CAF parents, only one in 10 (10%) reported that their child(ren) “had trouble adjusting after moving/relocation,” while **nearly half (47%) did not experience any issues**.<sup>29</sup>



The transition to civilian communities has had an impact on the **school experiences of military children**. Most used to attend on-base Department of National Defence schools (which no longer exist),<sup>30</sup> but now attend civilian schools, where educators, school counsellors and their peers may not have an understanding of their experiences or how to provide support.



Many parents have expressed concern, with more than half (54%) of surveyed CAF spouses reporting that they felt “military children are at a disadvantage because civilian public **schools do not understand military life**.”<sup>31</sup>

Relocation can have an **impact on academic performance**, particularly if the move occurs mid-year or if it’s across provincial borders, since academic progress can be affected by differences in school curricula and standards.<sup>32</sup>



More than one-third (36%) of surveyed CAF spouses whose **partners were ill or injured** said that **most days were “quite a bit” or “extremely” stressful**. The most frequently cited stressors include partner and partner’s health (e.g., physical, mental), family, work and military (e.g., partner’s medical release).<sup>33</sup>

CAF personnel report spending one-quarter (24%) of their time **away from home on military-related duties**.<sup>34</sup>



In 2017, two-thirds of Regular Forces personnel reported **experienced extended absences from their family**.<sup>35</sup>

### **Military and Veteran families access services in their neighbourhoods**

High mobility among many military families can lead to **difficulties securing quality, regulated child care**. With each move, CAF parents can find themselves repeatedly at the bottom of wait lists. Furthermore, available child care services are usually arranged to accommodate typical 8-hour workdays, and are not always responsive to the immediate and emergency taskings, relocations and irregular hours associated with military life. This has an acute impact on the 8.2% of CAF families with children who have special needs.<sup>36</sup>



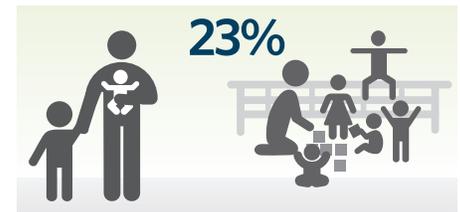
In 2017, military families in Canada and abroad included 81,400 **children under 18**, most of whom (96%, or 78,000 children) are in Canada.<sup>37</sup>



As with child care services, military families sometimes face difficulties securing a **family doctor**. While the Canadian Forces Health Services (CFHS) provides medical and dental services to military personnel, their **families do not have any access to military doctors, dentists or other CAF health care professionals**. Instead, they rely on the same health care providers as the civilian population.

In 2015, 44% of surveyed CAF spouses reported **difficulty re-establishing medical services** after relocation.<sup>38</sup>

In 2013, 24% of military spouses said they **did not have a family physician for themselves** and 17% **did not have one for their children**.<sup>39</sup> This compares with just under 16% among the general population.<sup>40</sup>



In 2016, nearly one-quarter (23%) of surveyed CAF personnel reported having **difficulties accessing child care** (e.g. (quality, distance, expense, waiting list, hours, etc.).<sup>41</sup>



In 2013, surveyed CAF spouses reported that they **manage child care in diverse ways**, including through civilian daycare centres (26%), relatives (16%) and Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) daycare services (13%).<sup>42</sup>

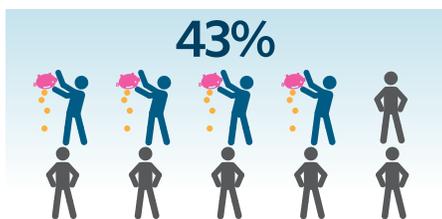




**The “military lifestyle” can have an impact on family finances and career development**

Research shows that the relocations associated with military life can have a significant **impact on family finances** due to a variety of factors, including resulting changes in the cost of living, wages (CAF member or spouse), mortgage/rent, tax rates and more.<sup>43</sup>

Military and Veteran families also have **unique employment experiences** and challenges in the labour force. Due to the high mobility associated with military life, many CAF partners experience difficulty developing or progressing in their careers, while some Veterans navigate significant periods of transition as they adjust to civilian life.



In 2018, 43% of surveyed CAF members who had been posted to a new geographic location and 52% of CAF spouses reported that their **financial situation had become worse**, with a change in the cost of living cited as the main reason.<sup>44</sup>



Many **non-military spouses** surveyed in 2018 reported difficulties finding employment that **matches their experience and education** and/or **maintains their seniority**.<sup>45</sup>

More than half felt (15% agreed, 37% strongly agreed) that they **“had to take a job for which [they] were overqualified** as a result of relocating for [their] spouse’s military career.”<sup>46</sup>



More than half (51%) of surveyed CAF spouses say they have **made some career sacrifices** because of their partner’s military service.<sup>47</sup>



While three in 10 (30%) surveyed CAF spouses say their career has not been affected, one in 10 (11%) report that they are unemployed or that their **career has been “severely affected”** because of their partner’s military service.<sup>48</sup>

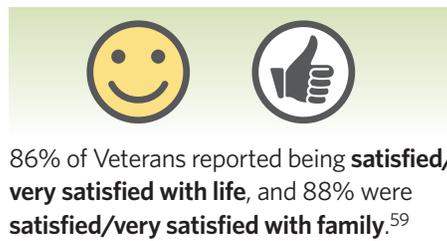
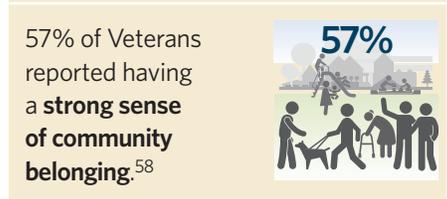
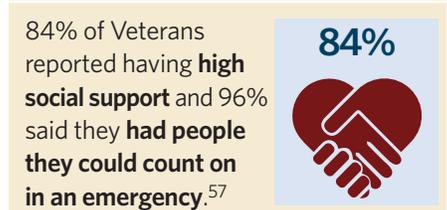
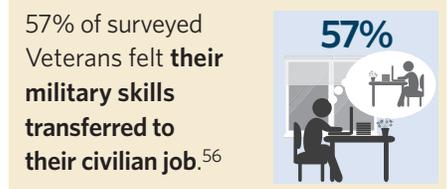
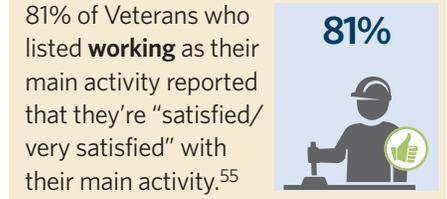
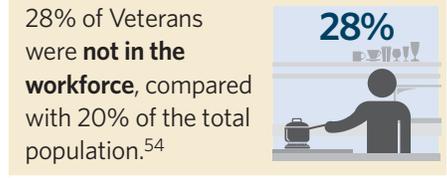
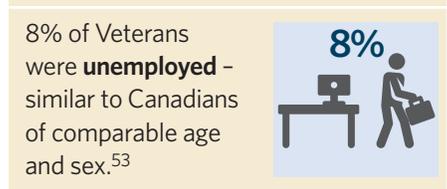
*Regular Force Veterans reported that the transition to civilian life is easier when they find satisfying employment, take care of their mental health, maintain their family relationships and can access other social support networks.*<sup>49</sup>

According to the Life After Service Study (LASS), in 2016:



**57% of Veterans** said that the transition to civilian life was easy for their *partner*, while 28% reported difficulties.

**60% of Veterans** said that the transition to civilian life was easy for their *children*, while 17% reported difficulties.





<sup>1</sup> Heidi Cramm et al., "The Current State of Military Family Research," *Transition*, Vanier Institute of the Family (January 19, 2016). Link: <http://bit.ly/23cypyu>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Military personnel with spouses and/or any dependants.

<sup>4</sup> Lynda Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada: Issues Facing Regular Force Members and Their Families*, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (August 2018). Link: <https://bit.ly/2AsPmv4>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Children" includes daughter, son, stepdaughter, stepson, foster child, all under the age of 18 (or over 18 if still considered a dependant).

<sup>8</sup> Veterans Affairs Canada, *Veterans Affairs Canada Statistics - Facts and Figures* (March 31, 2018). Link: <https://bit.ly/2rhONld>.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Beth MacLean et al., "Research on Military/Veteran Families" *Research Directorate - Veterans Affairs Canada* (December 14, 2015). Link: <http://bit.ly/2kvXpPX>.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Van Til et al., "Well-Being of Canadian Regular Force Veterans, Findings from LASS 2016 Survey," *Veterans Affairs Canada - Research Directorate Technical Report* (June 23, 2017). Link: <https://bit.ly/2hWH7y>.

<sup>11</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>12</sup> Van Til et al., 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Cramm et al., 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Similar to 2013 survey data, which found that 81% of surveyed CAF spouses reported living in owned civilian properties, 4% rented civilian homes and 14% lived on-base. See Z. Wang and N. Aitken, "Impacts of Military Lifestyle on Military Families - Results from the Quality of Life Survey of Canadian Armed Forces Spouses," *DGMFRA Technical Report* (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, "CAF Community Needs Assessment: 2016 Overall Results," *Prairie Research Associates* (August 2017). Link: <https://bit.ly/2yzKW48>.

<sup>16</sup> Lynda Manser, *Relocation Experiences: The Experiences of Military Families with Relocations Due to Postings - Survey Results*, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (May 2018). Link: <https://bit.ly/2O1IG3t>.

<sup>17</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, *The State of Canadian Military Families: Synthesis of Current Research* (August 2018). Link: <https://bit.ly/2NVc4zr>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, *The State of Canadian Military Families*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Figure derived from the average number of annual moves between 2013 and 2018. Data from this source includes all moves regardless of whether they have family dependants or were single without dependants.

<sup>25</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, "CAF Community Needs Assessment."

<sup>26</sup> Lynda Manser, *Military Families Caring for Elderly Parents: The Experiences of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel and Families Who Are Caring for Elderly Parents - Survey Results*, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (June 2018). Link: <https://bit.ly/2JibZ8c>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>29</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, "CAF Community Needs Assessment."

<sup>30</sup> The Department of National Defence used to run schools on military bases across the country for children in military families. First established for children in military families without access to other schools after World War II, they provided students with military-literate education that often integrated information about places to which their parents may be deployed. See Mishall Rehman, "DND School Board," *Canadian Military Family Magazine* (July 30, 2015). Link: <http://bit.ly/2ecaGfe>.

<sup>31</sup> Sanela Dursun and Kerry Sudom, "Impacts of Military Life on Families: Results from the Perstempo Survey of Canadian Forces Spouses," *Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Chief Military Personnel* (November 2009). Link: <http://bit.ly/1pbjBgC>.

<sup>32</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Military Family Services Program, "CF Child Care Status Update 2013," *Quality of Life / Military Family Services* (2013). Link: <http://bit.ly/2b9DwLO>.

<sup>35</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>36</sup> Military Family Services Program, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>38</sup> Wang and Aitken, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, *The State of Canadian Military Families*.

<sup>40</sup> Statistics Canada, "Primary Health Care Providers, 2016," *Health Fact Sheets* (September 27, 2017). Link: <https://bit.ly/2yx17AV>.

<sup>41</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, "CAF Community Needs Assessment."

<sup>42</sup> Military Family Services Program, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Manser, *Relocation Experiences*.

<sup>44</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>45</sup> Manser, *Relocation Experiences*.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dursun and Sudom, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Van Til et al., 2017.

<sup>50</sup> 15% reported that they found it neither easy nor difficult.

<sup>51</sup> Van Til et al., 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Veterans Affairs Canada, "Fast Facts on... Veteran Employment," *Info Briefs* (page last updated November 23, 2017). Link: <https://bit.ly/2NYGBwL>.

<sup>55</sup> Manser, *State of Military Families in Canada*.

<sup>56</sup> Van Til et al., 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## Military and Veteran Families in Canada: Vanier Institute Resources



### School Counsellors Working with Military and Veteran Families

A resource designed to increase military literacy among school counsellors serving military and Veteran families in Canada. This second of the *Working With* series was a collaboration between the Vanier Institute of the Family, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, Veterans Affairs Canada, Military Family Services and other key members of the Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle.



### Family Physicians Working with Military Families

A military literacy resource for family physicians and medical professionals who serve military and Veteran families in Canada. The first in the *Working With* series, this resource was developed with a panel of experts drawn from civilian practice and the military and Veteran community, including the Vanier Institute of the Family, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, Military Family Services, National Defence Health Services Group, Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research.



### Military and Veteran Families in Canada: Collaborations and Partnerships Compendium 1.0

This reference publication profiles organizations that are engaged in partnerships and collaborations that support military and Veteran families in Canada. Produced in collaboration with members of the Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle, this resource was created to raise awareness of initiatives underway and to strengthen the community of support among organizations and professionals that study, serve and support Canada's military and Veteran families.

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