



MILITARY FAMILY SERVICES

OPERATING PLAN

2014-2016

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Our Mission...

To contribute to the well-being of Canadian Armed Forces families, enabling a mission-ready force that protects Canadians and Canadian interests across the country and around the world.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's military families find themselves at a crossroads. Twenty years of near-continuous major operations, which have only recently come to a close, have exacted a toll that is unparalleled in the nation's contemporary military history. Today's military families have been asked to do appreciably more than families of the past, and they've been asked to do it more often. As a result, the community has experienced extended levels of stress and strain that have often had far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on family life. And families have done so largely in silence and obscurity, making the best of their situations despite the pressures.

This burden of the past two decades is more challenging as a result of a marked shift in societal norms and expectations occurring over this same period. The growing reality is that the formula that still works best for many, if not most, military families—the acceptance by the non-serving partner of inordinate parenting and household roles due to the relentless instability and unavailability of the uniformed spouse—is increasingly out of synch with national values whereby both partners aspire to sustained fulltime careers, and in so doing accept new levels of collaboration in raising children and running households. As the gap widens between how Canadian families and military families function, the military family experience will become increasingly isolated and challenging.

Finally, military families are already feeling the adverse effects of the fiscal pressures that dominate the current operating environment, and more such impacts are likely.

As much as the 2014-2016 period promises to be tenuous for families, it also presents an important opportunity. After two decades of reacting to emerging requirements and finding focused solutions to pressing problems, the current operational respite offers the opportunity to take a step back, listen intently, evaluate the effectiveness and coherence of institutional support to military families, and re-calibrate.

The Canadian military has a rich history of providing support to the family community dating back over 60 years. It is guided by the Canadian Armed Forces Family Covenant, which both acknowledges the inextricable relationship between healthy families and effective warriors, and underscores the nation's moral obligation to those who stand side-by-side those in uniform.

Institutional support for today's military families is led by the Military Family Services (MFS) Division and fueled by the Military Family Services Program (MFSP) - a community-based support program delivering coordinated, consistent national services while enabling local initiatives. The MFSP functions symbiotically with the vast network of Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs) located across Canada and overseas. These not-for-profit third party entities work closely with the Military Family Services Division, their local chains of command and community partners to deliver national services as well as tailored, community-specific offerings.

A number of strategic considerations are fundamentally influencing how military families are supported in the prevailing environment. These are:

Heightened Need. More frequent, generally longer and dramatically more dangerous operational commitments have become a defining feature of contemporary military family life, causing dislocation and heightening the challenges inherent in service life;

Latency and Aggregation. The complex problems that recurring deployments trigger habitually outlast the periods of those deployments by large margins. As such, the recent end of major Canadian Armed Forces operations after such a long sequence does not signal the end of the family dislocation these have caused or contributed to;

Operational Respite. While the pause in large-scale operational commitments after such a protracted period is welcomed, history

indicates that it could be short-lived. Moreover, the accumulated training and tasking remit accrued during periods of sustained operations considerably reduces the actual respite during such pauses;

Prevailing Fiscal Environment. As outlined, the current fiscal climate is adversely impacting military families, and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future;

Evolving Family Demographics. Canadian societal norms and expectations will continue to affect military families, as they always have. The sharper the social and demographic shifts, the more profound these influences will be for them; and

Leadership Commitment. Current Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces leadership have shown a steadfast commitment to the well-being of military families. This commitment in the face of adversity such as fiscal restraint will be central in continuing to provide families with the support they need and merit.

The Military Family Services mission is to contribute to the well-being of Canadian Armed Forces families, enabling a mission-ready force that protects Canadians and Canadian interests across the country and around the world.

The core values with which MFS executes this vital mission are *compassion, creativity, responsiveness, fairness and collaboration.*

Moreover, the MFS mandate is guided by a commitment to deliver support to military families that focuses on:

- outcomes to families rather than outputs by providers;
- the over-riding inter-connection between healthy families and operational capability and sustainability;
- integrating communities and partners into tangible, networked solutions for families;

- operating a program that is soundly and responsibly stewarded; and
- executing the function as the *no-fail mission* it must be.

Institutional support to military families during the 2014-2016 timeframe will be based on four priorities. These pillars will shape all effort and activity undertaken in support of families:

Enhance awareness, access and use of physical and mental health services. Access to health services, and the continuity of those services, continues to be a major obstacle for many modern military families. They must have a better understanding of where to go, who to ask, and how to gain access to health practitioners and services. Additionally, MFS support currently in place must be more effectively developed and leveraged to provide faster, more impactful outcomes to families.

Optimize the Military Family Services Program. After years of adjusting and tweaking, it is time for a comprehensive review and reformulation of the MFSP. A modernized program will tackle the major issues affecting contemporary military families, which often result from the intersection of *incessant separation*, *regular relocation* and *elevated risk*. These impediments include the traditional challenges that military families have faced for many years and even decades, as well as new and emerging issues. A modernized military family services program must also span the full spectrum of the military career. So, in addition to focusing on these core issues, it must also address the basic challenges of entry into the military lifestyle at the start of a military career, and transition to civilian life at career's end.

Communicate more effectively with families. The institution does not consistently communicate well with modern military families for a variety of organizational, geographic and technological reasons. This must improve in order to increase constituency awareness of the realities of military family life (including the programs and services on offer), and more importantly foster a heightened sense of inclusion, influence and

trust in the organization. Military Family Services must understand that today's families expect to be better informed and more fully engaged in the policies, processes and decisions that affect their lives. This is a function of our connected, networked world. Moreover, better communication must include improved listening - critical to delivering the outcomes that matter to military families. The leveraging of existing mechanisms and the creation of new ones, such as the Military Family Panel, will facilitate more active listening and better stakeholder communication.

Strengthen existing partnerships, foster new ones, and more fully leverage these relationships. No single organization, community, centre or provider has the knowledge and capacity to deliver comprehensive, definitive support to military families. The constituency is too diverse and the challenges it faces too complex. Institutional support to families must build upon existing relationships and increase collaboration levels in order to enable more and better support to families.

As with all major programs, measurement and evaluation will be pivotal in ensuring that military family support *performance* meets *promise*. Evaluation will focus on social impact to families: the outcomes rather than outputs. The MFS function will be systemically measured at 12-month increments, starting with an initial year zero baseline validation. MFS services, products and activities will be adjusted or re-focused as a result of these regular validations.

The 2014-2016 timeframe will be an important one for families despite the cessation of major Canadian Armed Forces operations. Many of the strains and stresses they have experienced over the past two decades will continue to impact their lives, most often adversely. So too will organizational pressures such as fiscal restraint, and societal shifts, including the continued recalibration of Canadian family norms. Any notion that the post-Afghanistan era will be easy for families is misinformed.

Institutional support to military families will take a much-needed step back to renew and update the program. This renewal will ensure that existing service delivery is better understood and more easily accessed. It will focus on re-establishing overall program coherence, centered on the decisive national/local balance. Finally, it will re-emphasize the requirement to both deliver, and enable the delivery of, tangible outcomes that make positive differences to military families.

Part 1: BACKGROUND

Introduction

“Families are the center of gravity. For soldiers to be effective when they’re deployed to mission areas, they need to rely on stable families.”

- A unit commanding officer with multiple tours in Afghanistan

Canada’s military families have been under tremendous strain during much of the past twenty years. A period of almost uninterrupted high-tempo operational deployments, book-ended by the Balkans in the mid-1990s and the recently completed mission in Afghanistan, has demanded considerably more from serving Canadian Armed Forces’ members and their families than in many professional generations.

Raising a family in Canada today is already a daunting prospect: sustaining loving relationships, raising children, caring for relatives, running functioning households, and managing careers. The challenge is often more formidable for military families, who must also deal with the unique intersection of **regular relocations** over which they have little or no influence, **persistent short and long-term separation** from family and household, and the **constant risk** involved in modern military training and deployed operations in volatile war zones around the world. The cumulative effect of these intertwined characteristics of modern service life is the reality that many Canadian military families have struggled, and even suffered, during the past 20 years, and continue to struggle and suffer today.

In many ways, military service is a lifestyle, demanding of its members a level of commitment and sacrifice (including the possibility of the ultimate sacrifice of giving one’s life) far exceeding the devotion required of almost any other profession. As such, serving the nation comes at an exceptional personal

cost, which members of the Canadian Armed Forces willingly accept. It is a hallmark of a professional military force. However, military life also defines the lives of those closest to serving members, with its many intended and unintended consequences. Yet it is a lifestyle that they have not explicitly signed on for, and one to which some family members are ill equipped to adapt.

Moving forward, the challenge military families face may become even more difficult as they find themselves increasingly out of synch with evolving Canadian societal norms. While the percentage of dual career/income families has never been higher, the formula for successful military family life remains largely dependent on the non-serving partner assuming an inordinate level of personal and professional sacrifice in order to provide stability and continuity within the family unit. As a result, the gap between the realities of general family life and service family life in Canada is widening, further isolating military families and often making it more difficult for them to cope if not succeed.

“My kids have only seen their father a total of eight months over the past three years. He’s missed five of their six birthdays during that time. Plus we’ve had to move across the country, leaving family and friends. Changing high schools and making new friends was very difficult for the kids. My new job has a lower salary and worse hours than the one I had before the move, and I’ve lost my seniority and many of my benefits. That’s just the way it is for us. It comes with the territory.”

- An Army wife of 14 years and mother of three children aged 4 to 11

Military Family Services (MFS), a division of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, is charged with supporting military families on behalf of the Forces and the Department of National Defence. Its authority and mandate are anchored in the National Defence Act and related directives. The Division is responsible for providing a wide array of services and offerings in its role as primary funder and steward of the Military Family Services Program (MFSP), the cornerstone of institutional support delivered to military families. It also manages the Children's Education Program.

Canada has a long history of supporting military families. In 1947, structured family support began with educational programs for Canadian military children. This legacy of educational support continues today in the form of two international schools with Ontario School Board teachers and curriculum located overseas.

Over the decades, support expanded as the unique needs of Canadian military families evolved and the link between family health and resilience, and military operational readiness and effectiveness became clear. The 1980s featured an assortment of loosely connected grassroots family initiatives in Canada and abroad. As the voice of families became increasingly focused, DND more fully accepted its fundamental social and moral obligations to military families by establishing the first formal publicly funded and nationally coordinated family support system in 1991. It forms the backbone of today's family-based approach to service delivery, consisting of a network of programs and services delivered both centrally as well as through a partnership with more than thirty family resource centres across the country and beyond.

The overlay of consistent national programing with tailored local programs and services adapted to regional need is the fulcrum of the modern Military Family Services Program.

In 1998, the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs published a seminal report outlining a number of concerns regarding the quality of life for serving members and military families. It helped catalyze a significantly increased funding base and an important expansion in national programming, both of which have been perpetuated to the present day.

The foundation of modern institutional support to military families is the Canadian Armed Forces Family Covenant, which formally acknowledges and enshrines the critical role that military families play in supporting serving members. The Covenant underscores the key contribution families make in enabling an operationally effective and sustainable military force, a conviction reinforced by over a decade in Afghanistan.



Military Families
**Strength Behind
the Uniform**

Canadian Forces Family Covenant

We recognize the important role families play in enabling the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces and we acknowledge the unique nature of military life. We honour the inherent resilience of families and we pay tribute to the sacrifices of families made in support of Canada. We pledge to work in partnership with the families and the communities in which they live. We commit to enhancing military life.



Introduced in 2008, the Covenant outlines the Canadian Armed Forces' responsibility on behalf of the nation to enhance the well-being of both serving members and their families in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice. It represents a moral commitment to do right by Canada's military families.

The Covenant also focuses attention on the level of sacrifice asked of military families to audiences who reflexively understand the commitment of uniformed members, but are not nearly as aware of the impacts imposed on those who surround them. In so doing, it reinforces the obligation to ease the many burdens service life imposes on families.

Canada is not alone in acknowledging the special relationship of its serving members and their families. The United States, United Kingdom and Australia have similar covenants formalizing the pact between the larger society, the government that serves it, and the professional military community. It must be noted that the status of these covenants varies considerably, ranging from national legislation to institutional directive to organizational statement of intent. Accordingly, the sway each has in driving tangible outcomes to constituent families differs appreciably.

One of the immutable principles of the Covenant is fairness. Fundamentally, military families deserve the opportunity to lead family lives comparable to non-military Canadian families. As such, they must not be disadvantaged because their loved one has committed to serving the nation. Consequently, the challenges that are either unique to service life, or more pronounced because of it, should be addressed through institutional support, mitigating their adverse impacts to military families when and where possible. By the same token, support to military families must not provide them with undue advantage or gain compared to general Canadian families.

A number of comprehensive evaluations of Canadian Armed Forces' military family support were conducted in 2013, which will

shape and influence policy and programming for the foreseeable future. These include the systemic investigation of the Office of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman (*On The Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*), and the Chief of Review Services *Evaluation of Military Family Support Programs and Services*.

The latter report reaffirmed that core Military Family Services (MFS) programming is aligned with governmental, departmental and Canadian Armed Forces priorities, while highlighting a number of key areas for improvement. The Ombudsman investigation delivered a comprehensive qualitative assessment of modern Canadian military family life, outlining the persistent impediments families face and the attendant gaps in related programs and services. The cumulative findings and recommendations of the two reports were then reviewed and validated by a panel of family members, service providers and community partners.

Together, these assessments provide unfettered, highly informed third-party findings and recommendations aimed at focusing and improving support to families, which MFS is moving on assertively.

It is noteworthy that both reports made clear the progress achieved by the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces since the mid-1990s in expanding the array of programs and services available to families. The support on offer to today's military families is dramatically improved over what was available 20 years ago.

As with all Canadian families, the circumstances and needs of Canadian Armed Forces families continue to evolve in the new millennium. Military Family Services must remain focused on providing services and programs which are relevant today, while anticipating those of tomorrow. A key facet in achieving this will be striking the right balance between delivering core institutional support to the military family community while concurrently enabling individual families to position themselves for success.

Serving families is a fundamental responsibility of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. In recent years it has become increasingly clear that Canadian military families serve our nation selflessly and often silently by virtue of their unrelenting support of their uniformed loved ones. This often comes at immense personal and professional sacrifice. Inasmuch, military families have earned the right to lead strong, successful family lives comparable to those of other Canadian families.

Strategic Considerations

“The commitment to serve, although officially assumed by the Canadian Armed Forces’ member, also has a profound effect on military families.”

- Lieutenant General David Millar,
Chief of Military Personnel

Heightened Need. As outlined, much more is being asked of modern military families than in generations past. The nature of contemporary Canadian Armed Forces operational deployments of the 1990s and 2000s has been more volatile, hostile and deadly than at any time since the Korean conflict of the early 1950s. Moreover, the cadence of deployments from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s increased substantially, with a significant proportion of the military community experiencing multiple rotations in very compressed timeframes during this period. Overall, more frequent, generally longer and dramatically more dangerous absences by the serving partner are a defining feature of today’s military lifestyle.

The result of this high-tempo operational environment is clear; many military families are struggling to cope with the heightened pressures of service life, suffering from the litany of medical, health, social, relationship, child-rearing, financial, adaptation and related consequences triggered or accentuated by modern Canadian service life.

Latency and Aggregation. The recent completion of Canada's commitment in Afghanistan and the absence of a new major operational mission on the immediate horizon might suggest that the challenge to families has decreased considerably, however academic research and contemporary experience both suggest otherwise. There is a latency involved with the challenge military families face, meaning that the complex mix of problems that result from the heightened pressures of intensive operations often manifest themselves for long durations, well after the troops have returned home. Furthermore, there can be lengthy gestation periods before family issues actually come to light, prolonging this holdover period. So while the cessation of operations in Afghanistan has created more space for families to lead healthy, resilient lives, many will find themselves dealing with the impacts caused over the last number of years for a significant time to come.

Additionally, the aggregate effect of a significantly increased operational tempo over condensed time spans can be insidious. Multiple deployments over a concentrated period often have a multiplying effect. The destabilizing consequences a family endures as a result of a second mission can be more than twice those of an initial deployment, and so on. For families that have experienced multiple deployments in recent years, or otherwise faced markedly increased mobility, separation and/or risk, the dislocation to family life can be profound, long lasting and even irreparable.

The latent and aggregate effects on families of increased operational tempo are not well understood outside of the constituency, though both have featured prominently in recent independent research and analysis. The fieldwork conducted by the Office of the Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman as part of the systemic investigation on the state of modern military families validated both impacts in extensive consultations with constituent families. Moreover, a comparative analysis conducted by the Ombudsman involving Canada's closest Allies yielded very similar results. Finally, these observations on latency and aggregation are

highly consistent with post-2000 academic research conducted by the RAND Corporation and Purdue University's Military Families Research Institute, two global authorities on contemporary military family life.

Operational Respite. The 2014-2016 timeframe is important for Canadian Armed Forces families. As outlined, it will be a period for them to work through the impacts of the 1990s and 2000s, and re-establish stability and balance within their family units. The probable absence of a major operational commitment for at least part of this period will provide a degree of respite, though the everyday rigors of military life remain pervasive. Moreover, the large backlog of non-operational commitments will continue to drive an intensive workload for the foreseeable future. Though the next major operation will likely be difficult to predict, recent history suggests that this relative pause may be short-lived.

Prevailing Fiscal Environment. The pressure to reduce resources post-Afghanistan is another strategic reality. The reduction remit is considerable across government, and DND is a major contributor. As a result, few if any functions within the Forces are likely to be unaffected by new constraints on resources, including military family support. In the wake of the continued pressures of service life, twinned with the cumulative wear of the past two decades, significant reductions will have adverse impacts. The Military Family Services Division will continue to seek stable funding and internally realign resources to meet new and changing priorities, ensuring that outcomes generated from the existing resource base are maximized.

Evolving Family Demographics. The nature of the typical Canadian family has changed dramatically over the past 20 years, influencing military families in the process. The stability of previous generations has given way to more fluid family units likely to re-configure, sometimes repeatedly, over a career. As a result, the legal, social, financial, geographic, cultural, linguistic, custodial and logistical factors inherent in modern family life are noticeably more complex. One of the most striking changes to

the contemporary family is the propensity for both partners to pursue careers or continuous long-term employment. This has dramatically affected parental and household roles, re-shaping the impact of gender within prevailing societal norms.

The Canadian Armed Forces must track evolving societal trends closely, evaluating their impacts on the aspirations, expectations and limitations of modern military families.

“Taking care of the well-being of our troops and their families remains a high priority for me.”

- General Tom Lawson,
Chief of the Defence Staff

Leadership Commitment. The commitment of senior DND and Canadian Armed Forces leadership to provide families with the support they need to be healthy and resilient is steadfast, as outlined by the Chief of the Defence Staff in his *Guidance to the Canadian Armed Forces*. It falls to the Chief of Military Personnel, whose functions include the provision of support to military families, and his Director General of Morale and Welfare Services, charged with executing this mandate, to translate this institutional commitment into concrete action.

Reinforced by the dynamics of the past twenty years, commanders at all levels are more aware of the inextricable relationship between operational readiness and healthy military families post-2000. In light of institutional pressures to reduce investment levels across the board, the CDS has underscored the importance of optimizing family support outcomes within a constrained resource framework in order to deliver maximum effect to families while ensuring long-term viability. This represents a considerable challenge.

Part 2: FOUNDATION

“Today’s military families face more and different challenges than before. They need support to have any chance of leading reasonable family lives.”

- A social worker serving the military family community

Mission

The Military Family Services mission is to contribute to the well-being of Canadian Armed Forces families, enabling a mission-ready force that protects Canadians and Canadian interests across the country and around the world

Values

In addition to the core Canadian military values of integrity, professionalism, trust and respect, the Military Family Services function will be:

Compassionate. MFS will strive to fully understand the complex issues and situations modern military families face, from the families’ perspectives. And it will focus more intently on developing real solutions that deliver tangible results for families. Walking a mile in their shoes will be a persistent theme.

Creative. MFS will develop innovative solutions to the challenges confronting modern military families. Creative thinking, intellectual rigor and the courage to consider innovative ways of delivering solutions and services to families will be valued and strongly encouraged.

Responsive. MFS will be agile and flexible, resulting in faster response times and a strengthened ability to shift attention and resources to emerging priorities.

Fair. MFS will support modern military families fairly and objectively, free from any bias, motive or agenda other than delivering tangible outcomes to constituents.

Collaborative. MFS will work more closely with clients, partners and enablers to develop more effective solutions and deliver more tangible services to families. Strong, trusting relationships with the military family community directly, and through the Military Family Resource Centre network, are essential.

“We have to get on the same page and work better together to fix some of the problems many families have been dealing with for years.”

- A senior Navy commander

Principles

A number of guiding principles will help translate the MFS mission and values into tangible outcomes that matter to military families.

Support to military families will be family centered.

Families know what their needs are and what works best, and therefore must influence the approaches and offerings developed by service providers. In serving the community of families, the MFS Division will channel its resources and efforts to developing solutions that are shaped by families and deliver tangible, meaningful outcomes to them. Activities not directly linked to such outcomes will not be undertaken or pursued.

Support to military families will be operationally focused. Modern military family support will be anchored in the fundamental relationship connecting healthy, resilient families with strong, effective warriors. Over and above the institution’s moral obligation to military families, this direct link between families and operational readiness will guide and fuel MFS.

Support to military families will more fully integrate communities. The communities where military families live and work are more diverse and influence military family life differently than in the past. The growing trend of living away from military bases is a major component of this. As a result, the impact of local community must be integrated more fully into family support planning and service delivery, ensuring that national efforts compliment and reinforce local services, and vice versa. Moreover, social inclusion leveraged through partnerships between MFS and local entities will be actively encouraged. These partnerships must be strengthened and grown as they are pivotal in ensuring this institutional-to-grassroots synergy.

Support to military families will be soundly stewarded. MFS, as mandated by Treasury Board, will exercise sound, responsible national oversight and management of military family support programming, funding and validation. It will also provide leadership, guidance, structure and/or assistance in the delivery of regional and local services. Ensuring the long-term value, sustainability and accountability of the military family support function within the prevailing fiscal environment will continue to be an over-arching priority in managing this social enterprise.

Support to military families is a no-fail mission. Healthy, resilient military families are at the core of a modern professional military force, influencing recruiting, retention, morale, performance, reputation, operational readiness and operational sustainability. The Canadian Armed Forces' ability to defend Canadians and Canadian interests depends on effective support to modern military families, inspiring MFS to successfully contribute to their well-being.

Definitions

The key terms outlined below are defined as follows:

Family

Family is defined (according to the respected Vanier Institute of the Family) as any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:

- Physical maintenance and care of group members
- Addition of new members through procreation or adoption
- Socialization of children
- Social control of members
- Production, consumption, distribution of goods and services
- Affective nurturance – love

Military Family

A military family is understood to be all Canadian Armed Forces' personnel, Regular and Reserve Force, and their parents, spouses, children and relatives.

It also includes Non-Public Fund (NPF) and Department of National Defence civilian employees during a deployment with the Canadian Armed Forces to a mission area outside of Canada, their parents, spouses, children and dependent relatives.

Finally, family members and persons of significance to Canadian Armed Forces personnel who die while serving remain part of the military family community in perpetuity.

All military family members matter regardless of provenance. However, there is an obvious and important connection between relational proximity of family members to serving personnel, and

the extent to which service life affects their family lives. Support to military families must focus most intently upon those within the military family community who are most vulnerable and adversely impacted, which is invariably the immediate family living within the household of the serving member, along with the member's parents. It is for this reason that, while the range of family support programming extends across the breadth of the constituency, the bulk of services focuses on spouses, children and parents. To approach this otherwise would be unfair to those most challenged by the particularities of Canadian military family life.

Military Family Services (MFS)

Military Family Services is responsible for the provision of national support to Canadian Armed Forces families, as well as funding for, and stewardship of, the Military Family Services and Children's Education Programs.



Military Family Services Program (MFSP)

The Military Family Services Program is the Canadian Armed Forces-wide community-based support program delivering coordinated, consistent national services for families, as well as a framework for families and communities to influence and manage local priorities and services.



Children's Education Management

Children's Education Management manages the education allowances and overseas schools for the Department of National Defence personnel to ensure that their children obtain the same quality of education regardless of the province or country they may be posted to.



Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC)

Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs) are incorporated, not-for-profit, third-party organizations working in partnership with the Military Family Services Division, the local chain of command and other community partners to deliver core programs mandated by the Military Family Services Program as well as tailored services driven by particular community or geographic needs. There are over 30 MFRCs across Canada, in the United States and Europe. They are generally governed by elected Boards of Directors, which must have a majority representation of military family members.

Part 3: PLAN

Approach

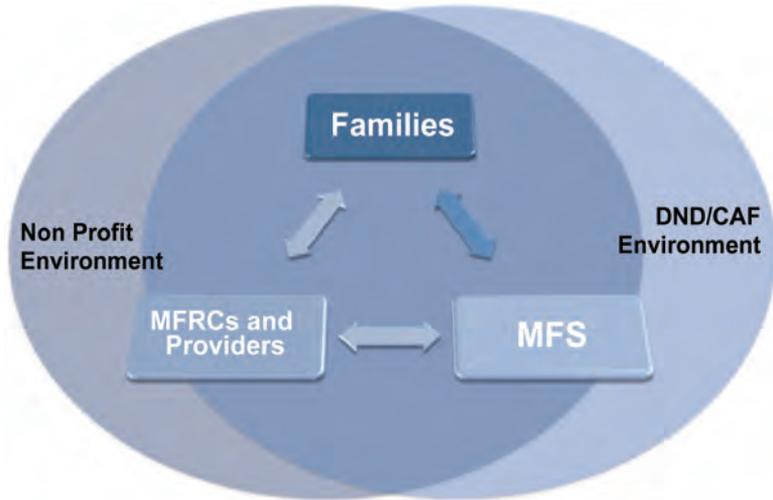
The Military Family Services Operating Plan 2014-2016 is based both on the conceptual foundation and strategic considerations outlined earlier, and the internal and external deliberations and consultations from the spectrum of military family community stakeholders, including the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief of Military Personnel, the Director General Morale and Welfare Services, Military Family Resource Centre Boards and Executive Directors, other government and community service partners, internal and external research, third party evaluation, and of course military families themselves.

The key to supporting modern military families in the post-2000 environment is the decisive relationship between **military families**, whose well-being is essential to operational readiness; the more than 30 **Military Family Resource Centres** located across Canada and overseas that deliver much of the front-end programming and service outcomes which directly benefit families, and the national and community partners who enable this; and **Military Family Services**, whose mission it is to ensure that families receive the support they need and deserve through direct investment and flow-through programs and services.

This triangular relationship is essential to providing modern military families with the support required to navigate the many challenges of service life of today and tomorrow. Trusted relationships and leveraged partnerships are the key to delivering the right support, in the right time and space, and in the right proportions.

The collective challenge is thus to foster and improve upon existing relationships and partnerships, moving past the obstacles that have impeded collaboration in the past. The strength and success of tomorrow's military families depend on it.

This foundational relationship is depicted below:



Core Partnership: the cornerstone of effective support to modern Canadian Armed Forces families post-2000

Programming Context

With the completion of the twelve-year Afghan mission and with it 20 years of near continuous high-tempo deployed Canadian Armed Forces operations, 2014-2016 is an especially important period for military family support. This is so for the various reasons broached earlier:

- Many Canadian military families are struggling and even suffering in the post-2000 timeframe, and will continue to for the coming years due to the latency and aggregation of family challenges triggered by sustained operational deployments;
- The nature of the post-2000 Canadian family is changing appreciably, necessarily re-shaping how military families adapt to, and are affected by, the issues and impediments inherent in service life;

- The shifting demographics of contemporary military membership in the new millennium have caused a commensurate swing in the composition of modern military families - they are much more diverse and complex than in generations past. This is prompting adjustments in how contemporary military families are supported; and
- Mounting pressures to generally reduce DND support programs as a function of the current operational respite, combined with pronounced institution-wide fiscal restraint, are resulting in resource reviews of all Canadian Armed Forces activities, including the family support function.

The shifting scope and nature of support to military families has prompted an array of far-reaching punctual adjustments and improvements to MFS programs and services over the years. Most of these have been executed on the fly to deliver rapid effects to emerging or unforeseen requirements - a situation that is not atypical during periods of sustained high-tempo operations.

The Canadian Armed Forces is more than 23 years into the current iteration of the Military Family Services Program. In the wake of all the punctual changes, most notably over the past decade, it is now time for a comprehensive review and reformulation of the program. Continuing to tweak and tinker will no longer provide suitable results for the evolving needs of modern military families.

The current respite in major operational commitment provides a window of opportunity to conduct such a reformulation. The timeframe is also opportune given the institutional introspection that prevailing fiscal restraint is prompting.

MFS Priorities

Military Family Services priorities are fueled solely by the outcomes they deliver - the social value and impact they have to the military family community. This contrasts with other operations within the Morale and Welfare Services Group that are commercial in nature and thus driven largely by profit and reinvestment in the military community.

Four priorities will shape the activities and investments of the Canadian Armed Forces' commitment to modern military families during the 2014-2016 timeframe. They are:

- Priority 1:** Support enhanced awareness, access and use of physical and mental health services;
- Priority 2:** Optimize the Military Family Services Program;
- Priority 3:** Communicate more effectively with families; and
- Priority 4:** Strengthen existing partnerships, foster new ones, and more fully leverage these relationships.

Priority 1: Support enhanced awareness, access and use of physical and mental health services

Maintaining their physical and mental health is a constant concern for military families. Health issues continue to challenge an appreciable proportion of the community, due in large measure to the complex lifestyle stresses outlined earlier such as mobility and isolation. Additionally, the latency factor of operational deployments, including the occurrence of Post-Traumatic Stress and other Operational Stress Injuries, can lead to unhealthy situations. The many families thrust into primary caregiving roles as a result of injuries or illnesses sustained by serving members shoulder tremendous burdens, and frequently experience stressors including role dislocation, financial distress and social impacts on youth. This regularly translates into an increased susceptibility to physical and/or mental health problems for non-serving family members.

Accessing primary health care is essential to maintaining physically healthy military families. It is also the pivotal first step in securing mental health care for families in need. Consequently, keystone health-related information must be communicated to military families more readily and effectively. They must clearly know where to go, who to ask, and how to gain access to provincial health care coverage, family physicians, and referrals for specialized services in the province in which they reside, or their country of residence if posted outside of Canada.

Continuing to listen and better understand this health challenge military families routinely face is essential to their well-being. This must be achieved through continued and enhanced dialogue with them both directly and through Military Family Resource Centres, care providers and the chain of command, and reinforced by awareness and close examination of current and emerging social and academic research, including credible, actionable analysis conducted by informed observers such as the Chief of Review Services and the Ombudsman.

Implicit in this is the need to improve the correlation between program and activity *outputs*, and the tangible, positive *outcomes* these deliver to military families. This will be attained through the dialogue outlined above, twinned with more assertive program performance measurement based on indicators such as feedback from MFRCs, Family Liaison Officers and other care providers; *Operation Family Doc*, *Family Information Line* and *FamilyForce* input and metrics; and data from the QOL/*Your Say* survey and other statistical samplings including focus testing.

Finally, awareness and promotion of a healthy lifestyle through information and related activities will enable military families to make sound decisions and choices regarding overall health and well-being. This will continue to be a MFS focus.

***“Family life is tough. Military life is tough.
Military family life can be really difficult.”***

- A senior Air Force Chief Warrant Officer

The major activities supporting enhanced awareness, access and use of physical and mental health services include:

- Increasing levels of engagement with community partners and advising them on military family-related physical and mental health concerns and issues;
- Promoting greater community dialogue through a compelling mental health awareness campaign and more expansive social media engagement;
- Leveraging industry evidence-based mental health psycho-education programming for the military family community; and
- Fostering new relationships and closer partnerships with recognized leaders and professionals in mental health thought and practice.

While much progress has been achieved in supporting the physical and mental health of today's military families, it remains a key concern as voiced by multiple stakeholders: military families themselves, MFRCs and other care providers, the chain of command, and informed observers. Military Family Services will continue to focus on current and new programs, services and initiatives aimed at both providing easier access to provincial health care and delivering specialized programs tailored to the particular needs of contemporary service life. Without proper support in maintaining the physical and mental health of Canadian military families, assuring their well-being is not possible.

Priority 2: Optimize the Military Family Services Program

After years of adjusting and improving, often in the face of emerging operationally-triggered circumstances, it is time for a comprehensive review and reformulation of the Military Families Services Program. This reformulation will be influenced primarily by the vast number of direct and indirect interactions over the past 18 months with military families, MFRCs and care providers, the chain of command and other military family community partners and advocates. It will also reflect the findings and recommendations of the CRS and DND Ombudsman investigations of 2012-2013, along with the practical experiences and lessons learned by the MFS team throughout the post-2000 period.

This review and reformulation of the MFSP will tackle the major issues affecting today's military families. These can be grouped into three categories:

- Traditional challenges which have impacted military families in much the same manner over many years, such as access to and continuity of health care, spousal employment, access to child care, education continuity, and housing;

- Traditional challenges which now impact families differently than in the past, including financial distress, primary care-giving, parenting roles, and social isolation; and
- New challenges which were unforeseen until relatively recently, such as increased inter-personal connectivity.

An optimized MFSP must focus on delivering tangible outcomes to modern military families dealing with the full range of persistent challenges inherent in contemporary Canadian Armed Forces service life. These are fuelled primarily by the intersection of *incessant separation, high risk, and regular relocations* throughout a military career - circumstances largely unique to military families.

To address such a broad range of issues, a series of working groups and tiger teams have been stood up to review individual challenges and develop innovative mitigating options and solutions. These groups/teams will be active for much of 2014-2016, culminating in a reformulated, optimized Military Family Services Program.

Understanding the needs of military families of today and tomorrow is essential in developing an optimized MFSP. The community needs assessments conducted every three years at each military community in concert with MFRCs are a key input. The methodology involved in these assessments is being updated to ensure that they deliver the level of insight necessary to align programs and services to both current and evolving military family needs.

The major activities supporting an optimized Military Family Services Program include:

- Modernizing MFSP funding and accountability processes;
- Revising MFS/MFSP policies, procedures and documentation to reflect modern Canadian military family requirements; and
- Developing and implementing a MFRC Accreditation program.

Again, validating the extent to which Military Family Services Program outputs result in positive, tangible outcomes for military families is central to improving institutional support. A rigorous performance measurement component will be integrated into the MFSP, complete with clear performance, review and reporting protocols.

An optimized MFSP will fuel military family support for the foreseeable future, with its attendant impact on Canadian Armed Forces operational capability and sustainability. It is an obvious MFS priority for 2014-2016.

Priority 3: Communicate more effectively with families

Communicating with military families has historically been challenging for a variety of reasons, including the hierarchical, member-centric structure of the Canadian Armed Forces; the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of the military family community; its geographic dispersion; and the fluid, dynamic nature of service life. And as with many large organizations, the adoption of new communications approaches and technologies has occurred reluctantly, further increasing the challenge.

Overall, the institution is not connecting effectively with modern military families on a sustained basis. Improved communication is required to increase understanding of Canadian Armed Forces life, foster a heightened sense of inclusion and influence, and generate trust and confidence in an organization that genuinely cares. On a more pragmatic level, there is an equally important need to increase awareness amongst families of the range of programs, services and initiatives aimed at mitigating the many challenges inherent in the military lifestyle.

Aligned with Canadian societal expectations, the focus in connecting with military families moving forward will continue to be on constructive, two-way engagement instead of one-way communication *to* and *at* them. Modern platforms, including social

media networks, will be leveraged more than ever to enable this running conversation between military families, Military Family Services, MFRCs and care providers, the chain of command, and key partners. This will enhance the *listening* function alluded to earlier in this plan, upon which an optimized MFSP depends. As significantly, it will reshape the relationship between the constituency and the organization.

A cornerstone of this enhanced listening and improved connection with families will be the establishment of the Military Family Panel. This new framework will ensure that the voice of families is projected directly to institutional leadership, influencing military family program and service design, execution and evaluation.

Additionally, Military Family Services is currently updating its social media policy to enable more decisive engagement in connecting with the community and sustaining dynamic, productive interaction.

Enhancing communication with families will be guided by the implementation of an updated national military family communications strategy. This strategy will combine an increased use of visual and interactive content with authentic family-focused messaging, more agile and prompt response to feedback, and greater leveraging of new platforms and networks. The narrative will be direct and assertive, reiterating the Canadian Armed Forces' commitment to modern military families and demonstrating how this commitment is being honored, adapted and strengthened.

The strategy will also build the military family support *brand*, which is not sufficiently positioned at present. In the prevailing information environment, stakeholders increasingly seek social and cultural connections with the organizations with which they interact. These are most often provided by recognized brands, which serve to bring familiarity and order amidst the clutter, and inspire trust. This renewed military family support brand will be anchored on the demonstrable impact that the collective

support community delivers to military families. *It will be driven by performance, not promise.*

In addition, MFS will develop a subset marketing and stakeholder engagement plan aimed at amplifying interconnections with, and message conveyance to, military family community stakeholders. It will also reinforce the brand's re-positioning.

Content will drive this expanded engagement with military families. The language employed moving forward will be clearer, more direct and free of the organizational jargon that often creeps into Canadian Armed Forces communications products. The creative element of this content will be improved, increasing the probability that it sparks interest, connects and resonates with families in today's saturated information landscape. Finally, language of origin will play a more prevalent role, resulting in side-by-side content development rather than the current practice of developing in one language and translating into the other - a technique that has become ineffective in the current content-rich landscape.

This communications and marketing approach will be collective and inclusive. Stakeholders care little of the specific source of a program or service that is important to them. They care only that the service is at their disposal and meets their needs. As such, MFS will collaborate closely with MFRCs, care givers and partners to focus the positioning of the support-to-families function on the outcomes delivered from across the provider spectrum, precluding the internal divisions which are largely irrelevant to end users and that dilute productive interaction. Alignment of philosophy, approach and message amongst partners, primarily MFS and MFRCs in their roles as primary service deliverers and connectors, will be important. It will call for a level of collaboration and liaison that has sometimes proven elusive.

The communications and marketing activity will be an all-hands effort, encouraging, empowering and equipping every member of the MFS team to interact and communicate effectively with military families beyond the specific activities and transactions they are

involved in. It will underpin a shift in organizational culture to a *culture of engagement* whereby reaching out and connecting with constituents will become central. Consistent, assertive two-way internal communications will be a key enabler for this.

The major activities focused on communicating with families more effectively include:

- Establishing a Military Family Panel to facilitate the collective voice of families in informing and influencing support to modern military families;
- Developing a national marketing plan designed to enhance connections with families;
- Establishing a communications/marketing working group charged with synchronizing communication with key stakeholders, beginning with families;
- Redeveloping and converging national web platforms into a single, one-stop-shop hub website for Canadian Armed Forces members and families;
- Increasing the emphasis on, and opportunities for, joint communication activities amongst key stakeholders within the military family community; and
- Developing and implementing targeted awareness campaigns in response to specific military family imperatives.

Measurement is essential to communicating more successfully. Precise performance evaluation will be integrated into the communications strategy, identifying review and reporting protocols as well as key performance indicators. These will cover a mix of quantitative and qualitative inputs, including content visibility and usage; stakeholder feedback from families, MFRCs, care providers, the chain of command, and other partners; the volume and nature of FamilyForce.ca and Family Information Line visits and consults; and formal and informal consultation with military families themselves.

Priority 4: Strengthen existing partnerships, foster new ones, and more fully leverage these relationships

Communities lie at the heart of supporting modern military families effectively. No single organization, centre or provider has the mandate, resources, geographic footprint or stakeholder knowledge necessary to provide comprehensive, definitive support. The nature of the military family constituency is too diverse and disparate, and the challenges it faces too complex to be shouldered single-handedly. Instead, contributing to the well-being of Canadian Armed Forces families must be a collective, collaborative endeavor.

Existing partnerships within the military family support community have endured the inordinate pressures of deployed operations on a scale unseen in over half a century. They have also weathered the rampant organizational flux that plagued the function at the national level throughout much of the post-2000 period. That these relationships exist at all in the midst of such strains is remarkable, and speaks to the enormous dedication to the mission of all involved.

There is a requirement to reinforce existing partnerships forthwith, especially the central relationship upon which military families so clearly depend - that between families themselves, their Military Family Resource Centres and local providers, and Military Family Services nationally. This necessarily entails increasing the levels of cooperation, synergy and trust between all players. New opportunities for leveraged collaboration must be sought and exploited. All interactivity must be driven by the singular focus on *outcomes to military families in need* rather than ownership of service or product. Supporting military families successfully today and tomorrow depends on it.

The major activities focused on strengthening existing partnerships, fostering new ones, and more fully leveraging all relationships include:

- Collaborating and sharing more regularly and fully through formal and informal mechanisms;
- Establishing performance measurements to assess community capacity, including knowledge, attitudes and behaviors among community partners;
- Developing and implementing a knowledge exchange and awareness strategy;
- Increasing linkages with national policy organizations and federal/provincial governments to facilitate employment and education mobility for military families; and
- Identifying and promoting formal networking opportunities and events for community partners and organizations.

Performance Measurement

The execution of these Military Family Services priorities will be measured methodically at twelve-month increments throughout the reporting period to ensure they are delivering the desired effects. The results of this performance measurement will be communicated to the military family community in the interests of transparency.

The key performance indicators against which the family support function will be evaluated will focus on social return on investment; specifically the *extent to which MFS activities and services are tangibly contributing to the well-being of contemporary military families*. These indicators will consist of a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures around the familial challenges triggered or exacerbated by Canadian Armed Forces life. Primary community stakeholders, predominantly military families themselves, will

be involved in determining these indicators. A 2014 baseline evaluation will be conducted concurrent with the initiation of this Operating Plan, providing a firm basis for comparison moving forward.

Adjustments to the MFS program will be applied in response to this methodic performance measurement. Activities and services not directly contributing to tangible family outcomes will be re-focused or discontinued. Measurement must and will fundamentally shape performance.

Part 4: CONCLUSION

After many years of responding almost exclusively to pressing requirements, most borne from two decades of near-continuous operations, there is a patchwork quality to elements of the Canadian Armed Forces institutional support to families. This has been exacerbated by competing requirements during this same timeframe of securing and maintaining reasonable resource levels, restoring neglected or dysfunctional relationships, re-organizing and re-structuring internally, and assembling a team with the right array of skills and experience.

Inasmuch, 2014-2016 presents an important opportunity for the military families support function to take a step back, listen intently, evaluate its effectiveness and coherence, and re-calibrate where required. Such an opportunity has not existed since the early 1990s.

The timing is equally opportune because the situation today's military family community faces is not substantively simpler or easier than that of recent years. Military families continue to confront daunting challenges in establishing and maintaining healthy, relatively stable family environments, several of which are holdovers of the sustained operational tempo that dominated the 1990s and 2000s. For many military families today, achieving persistent well-being is elusive.

The time for a renewal of institutional military family support is now for families, as it is for the institution.

This plan lays the foundation for this renewal. The updated mission is more focused and tangible than ever before. The values and principles with which the function will be executed moving forward are relevant to the families it serves, and will become embodied by all MFS practitioners as they conduct the business of supporting today's military families.

Most importantly, the implementation of the various components of this plan will continuously focus on a single question: *Does this program, service or product make a tangible and positive difference for the military families who need it?*

At the heart of this plan and its intent to deliver more tangible outcomes to families are partnerships, especially those with families themselves and the provider community led by the Military Family Resource Centers. These relationships have to be improved and more fully leveraged with the sole objective of providing better support to military families today and tomorrow. Increased trust and complicity will drive improved collaboration.

Finally, MFS will listen more intently to the military family community than ever before in its history, ensuring that it is delivering the offerings military families need. And it will measure its programming more closely than in the past, keeping performance in lockstep with promise.

The opportunity that the 2014-2016 period offers must be optimized. This plan seeks to achieve this.