

Time to provide full medical SUPPORT to our modern-day VETERANS

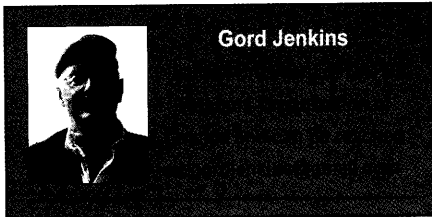
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DID YOU KNOW there are two categories of veterans in Canada? First, there are the traditional “war veterans” of the Second World War and the Korean conflict. Then there are the post-Korean War to current-day “veterans,” including those who have participated in the Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia conflicts, as well as peacekeepers and NATO vets.

These two groups have different legislations and are treated differently in terms of benefits. They have their own war veterans’ organizations. Currently, with the Second World War veteran population dying off, they have been looked after for benefits and security. The situation for contemporary veterans, however, is vastly different. These two groups are “segregated,” and it’s time to end segregation in Canada of veterans.

There are no longer federal veteran hospitals for veterans who are not “war veterans.” Veterans’ hospitals across Canada, for all intents and purposes, have been transferred to the provinces. A post-Second World War veteran who is no longer able to stay in his or her home must line up with everyone else in Canada to gain admission for long-term care at a provincial hospital. Long-term care is needed for post-Korea veterans as a principle. Who and how can be worked out once the principle is established.

At present, all veterans who have a



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sufficiently serious disability as a result of military service, and are in receipt of a disability pension, are entitled to assistance under the Veterans Independence Program (VIP), through the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is a very good program, designed to keep veterans in

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their home as long as possible. However, once the veteran is forced to leave the home due to degradation of physical or mental condition, they are then placed in a long-term care facility. The traditional war veteran is eligible for a contract bed in a provincial facility at government expense and on a priority basis. The modern-day veteran, on the other hand, is not eligible for a contract bed and must await the availability of a community bed without any degree of priority over others on the waiting list, and in many cases, at their own expense. This situation must not be permitted to continue. The government definition of a veteran as stated in 2001, “A Veteran is a Veteran,” must be upheld.

The fact is that our traditional war veterans are in receipt of benefits to which they are very justly entitled. Second World War veterans came home bearing the scars of war. Likewise, Korean War veterans were involved in fighting for two years and many

continued on with police action. They too are justly entitled to receive appropriate care. Modern-day veterans, on the other hand, frequently served for much longer periods of time and under a great variety of circumstances. However, they have no entitlement whatsoever to contract beds and may only be admitted to a community bed if they are in receipt of a disability pension. That is, a modern-day veteran is entitled to nothing more than waiting in line in the appropriate provincial health care system for admission to a short or long-term care facility when a vacancy occurs.

Does the government have a responsibility to care for veterans injured in the line of duty? Absolutely. Postwar vets have offered (and continue to offer) the supreme sacrifice with unlimited liability in the protection of our country and the pursuit of freedom. In pursuing their duty in the face of combat and operational commitments, many have shouldered challenges, wounds and sacrifice, which in many cases have been equal to or surpasses those of traditional war veterans. As such, all veterans deserve to be treated equally, and are deserving of specialized medical support and benefits. To differentiate, or to specify different classes of veterans, is to dishonor their service and commitment. They have won the right to full medical support from Veterans Affairs, including priority access to long-term care. If needed, they deserve to be able to spend their last days with dignity and respect in the care and company of their comrades. ✦

NOTE: This brief was presented to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.