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A Resource of the Invisible No More (INM) Project

TURNING VOICES INTO ACTION

Women Veterans Engage: Ottawa Workshop

March 2026



This resource was written by the team of the “Invisible No More: Canadian Women Veterans Moving the ACVA Report Recommendations to Full Implementation” project at the Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs (SICEMA), located at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Canada.

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Suggested citation:

Turning Voices Into Action. Women Veterans Engage: Ottawa Workshop [Resource]. March 2026. Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs (SICEMA), Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Canada.

Funding Acknowledgement:

This publication is part of the project, “Invisible No More: Canadian Women Veterans Moving the ACVA Report Recommendations to Full Implementation,” which receives funding from Veterans Affairs Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Department of National Defence.



National
Defence

Défense
nationale

Funded by Veterans Affairs Canada
Financé par Anciens Combattants Canada

Canada



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

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01 Executive Summary

On June 12, 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) released the parliamentary report *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*, which included 42 recommendations intended to improve research, policy, programs, and services affecting women Veterans in Canada.

The Women Veterans Engage: Ottawa Workshop, held on October 30, 2025, brought together women who served in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), along with advocacy partners, community organizations, and members of the Invisible No More (INM) Project team, to increase awareness of the report and support discussion of its implementation.

The workshop was one engagement activity within the broader INM Project at Mount Saint Vincent University. While the INM Project includes participatory research components, this event was designed specifically as a community engagement and knowledge-sharing forum rather than a research activity.

Its purpose was to broaden awareness of the ACVA report among women Veterans who were not previously involved in the study, create space to discuss practical pathways for implementing the recommendations, and strengthen connections among women Veterans across Canada.

Engagement activities such as this workshop help ensure that lived experience of a larger number of women Veterans informs evidence-based policy and program improvements. Workshops such as these also support the broader INM Project goal of helping to ensure that implementation of the ACVA report recommendations leads to visible improvements in programs, services, and long-term wellbeing for women Veterans

INM Workshop at a Glance

- **Date:** October 30, 2025
- **Location:** Ottawa, Ontario
- **Participants:** Over 30 attendees, including women Veterans (CAF and RCMP), INM Project team members, and invited contributors from across Canada
- **Purpose:** Support implementation of the ACVA report *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*
- **Host:** Invisible No More (INM) Project, Mount Saint Vincent University

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Why The INM Project Matters

The Invisible No More (INM) Project is a participatory research and engagement initiative at Mount Saint Vincent University that works with women Veterans to support implementation of the ACVA report recommendations. The project connects lived experience insights with research, policy dialogue, and institutional learning to support evidence-informed implementation of the report.

Women have served Canada in military and policing roles for over a century. Women now represent the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian Veteran population, with close to 100,000 women Veterans. Historically, Veteran programs and research have been designed around male service experiences, leaving gaps in understanding the distinct health, transition, and service experiences of women Veterans.

This has contributed to long-term challenges for some women Veterans, including:

- Health concerns that are not identified or treated correctly in a timely manner
- Barriers to accessing benefits and care
- Difficult transitions after release
- Experiences of isolation and loss of community
- Lack of national recognition for their service

These impacts can first appear years after release, when Veterans seek Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) claims for the first time, only to discover their service-related injuries and illnesses may not have been correctly diagnosed, cared for, or documented.

On June 12, 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) released the parliamentary report, *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*, documenting these realities and presenting 42 recommendations to bring about improvements. On October 10, 2024, the Government of Canada released its official response to the report, accepting most recommendations while noting or declining others. As a result, implementation is ongoing and progress will occur at different paces across departments.

The national conversation continues to move from recognition of the issues identified in the ACVA report toward action. Impacted Veterans across the country are asking not whether change is needed, but how quickly change can occur and how progress can be measured.

The Women Veterans Engage: Ottawa Workshop, held on October 30, 2025, was developed in partnership with women Veterans, advocacy partners, researchers, and community organizations supporting the implementation of the recommendations of the *Invisible No More* report.

Thirty CAF and RCMP women Veterans from communities large and small all across Canada participated in the workshop.

The Ottawa workshop asked a simple but urgent question:

How do we turn recommendations into visible, meaningful change for women Veterans?

CAF and RCMP women Veterans discussed, brainstormed, and started to develop a common understanding of the recommendations and a shared sense of the importance of this work. These women Veterans exchanged personal stories, identified priorities for recommendations implementation, and built networks capable of sustaining change efforts over time.

One participant summarized the urgency felt by many participants:

“We’ve done enough studies. Now we need to see change happening in real life.”

03 Workshop Purpose and Approach

The Ottawa workshop was organized as part of the INM Project co-led by Dr. Maya Eichler from Mount Saint Vincent University alongside women Veteran project partners. The INM Project focuses on moving the ACVA report recommendations toward meaningful implementation. The project also provides a structured space for dialogue between women Veterans, researchers, and institutions responsible for implementing the report’s recommendations.

Consistent with the participatory approach of the INM Project, women Veterans were involved in shaping the workshop design, discussion topics, and engagement approach.

The workshop served as both a community engagement event and a knowledge-translation exercise linking lived experience, research, and policy implementation at a national level.

Significance of the Women Veterans Engage: Ottawa Workshop

- a national convening
- a policy engagement event
- a knowledge translation exercise

The workshop focused on three objectives:

- Building connections among women Veterans
- Strengthening women Veterans' understanding of how change happens in government
- Identifying practical next steps to support implementation of the *Invisible No More* report recommendations

A strong theme throughout discussions was belonging. Many women Veterans described isolation after leaving the CAF or RCMP and the loss of professional and social networks that once had provided them daily structure and peer support.

As one participant noted:

“Just being in a room with other women who understand makes you feel less alone — and more ready to speak up.”

Participants emphasized that connection is important for their well-being but also essential to sustaining Veteran-related advocacy work over time. It is difficult to advance change on one's own, especially when it comes to federal-level policies. Networks allow participants to exchange information, reduce burnout, feel supported, and enable both emerging leaders and supporters of those taking on leadership roles to contribute to ongoing change efforts.

Participants shared lived experiences, discussed parliamentary processes, and worked together to identify where change efforts would be most effective to focus on next.

The workshop demonstrated that advancing change can take many forms. Some women testify publicly, while others organize behind the scenes, mentor peers, contribute to research, support outreach, or build networks connecting Veterans to resources and decision makers.

Every contribution makes a difference.

Everyone has a role to play in shaping change that benefits women Veterans—both current and future.

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What the INM Project Team Heard

Many women Veterans experience the departments of DND/CAF, Public Safety/RCMP, and VAC as disconnected departments, which can create confusion and delays when transitioning between organizations.

Women Veterans can be reluctant to ask for help. Navigating VAC claims processes and services can sometimes create additional stress for Veterans, particularly in complex cases. When women Veterans do ask for help, it can lead to compounding injury if their concerns are minimized or not dealt with appropriately due to staff who lack cultural and trauma training.

Participants emphasized the importance of sharing lessons learned with today's CAF and RCMP workplaces to help prevent future harms to the next generations of uniformed women.

Participants repeatedly voiced that many women Veterans want to become more involved in helping with change but need clearer entry points: *"Tell us where to start and we'll show up."*

Participants consistently highlighted several priorities for change:

Better coordination between CAF, RCMP, and VAC

Participants expressed a need for clearer government accountability, smoother information sharing, and cooperation and collaboration to prevent Veterans from having to navigate through multiple administratively complex systems, especially if doing so alone.

Trauma- and violence-informed services and faster responses

Participants underlined the need for services that understand trauma, respond more quickly, and reduce administrative burdens that delay access to care.

Transparency and accountability

Participants stressed the importance of regular government updates showing progress on commitments so that the women Veteran community can see what has improved and where challenges remain. Participants emphasized the importance of transparent monitoring tools, such as publicly accessible report cards tracking progress on implementation of the ACVA report recommendations.

Peer support networks

Participants explained that women-only spaces and informal peer networks are critical to recovery, rebuilding trust, and sustaining leadership after the end of their service. They can help build much needed belonging and community.

Practical advocacy tools

Participants repeatedly highlighted the growing implementation gap between parliamentary recommendations and visible changes in policy and service delivery.

Many women Veterans want to assist in implementation progress for the recommendations but are not sure how to safely and effectively engage with political and institutional processes. Training, toolkits, and mentorship can make involvement more accessible.

The INM Project team received feedback through a post-workshop survey that showed strong impact. All respondents said the workshop was worthwhile and increased their interest in learning how to turn their voices into action. Many expressed interest in helping to organize future regional events and in continuing engagement.

Participants left motivated not only to stay informed but to actively support implementation efforts.

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From Momentum to Implementation

Breakout discussion groups were asked to identify both strengths and ongoing challenges with initiatives such as the Invisible No More report and its recommendations.

One strength that participants identified with the *Invisible No More* report is that it validates women Veterans' experiences and creates momentum for change. Participants found that workshops like this one build community and trust, and help to develop future leaders and support networks that sustain collective efforts to improve programs and policies affecting women Veterans.

However, barriers were also identified. Many existing programs and administrative systems were developed before women were widely integrated into the CAF or the RCMP and therefore do not always reflect women Veterans' service experiences.

Responsibility for implementing parliamentary report recommendations can be unclear across government departments, and there is not always shared understanding between institutions and the women Veteran community about what satisfactory implementation would look like in practice. As a result, progress can sometimes appear slow or difficult to track. Processes intended to monitor government progress may also feel complex or intimidating for some participants, which can discourage engagement. In addition, some women Veterans expressed concern that speaking up—whether privately, publicly, or within institutional processes—could lead to negative repercussions affecting their access to services or relationships with institutions.

Participants noted that initiatives such as the INM Project can help bridge these gaps by connecting lived experience communities, researchers, and the institutions responsible for implementing policy change, helping to support clearer dialogue around progress, expectations, and accountability.

Despite these challenges, the workshop participants stressed a shared conclusion:

When women Veterans keep showing up together, it can lead to greater awareness, understanding, and fairness, alongside creating the potential for healing from institutional betrayals and harms.

Participants emphasized that implementation requires both government action and community engagement. Monitoring progress, raising concerns, and supporting each other are essential to sustaining momentum.

Some participants noted that significant long-term policy changes may be required and emphasized the importance of research to inform those changes.

However, participants noted that implementation does not always require large policy shifts. In many cases, improvements could begin with clearer communication, better coordination and a willingness to collaborate between departments and other groups, and ensuring frontline staff, case managers, service providers, and health care professionals understand women Veterans' service and post-service realities. Timely and visible progress builds trust and encourages continued engagement.

Next steps identified through the workshop include:

- Organizing regional workshops across Canada
- Developing advocacy training and toolkits
- Tracking progress on implementation of promised changes
- Supporting engagement with Members of Parliament and committees
- Strengthening collaboration across CAF, RCMP, and VAC systems

Success will ultimately be measured by real and meaningful positive outcomes for women Veterans and the optimization of all seven domains of well-being in women Veterans' current and future daily lives.

Momentum is growing across Canada. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring this momentum is sustained and translates into lasting advancements.

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Why Your Continued Engagement Matters

This workshop demonstrated growing national engagement among women Veterans who are determined to ensure that recommendations from parliamentary reports translate into meaningful action that positively impacts Veterans' lives. Participants left with a shared understanding that positive change is possible, and that working together makes progress faster and more sustainable.

Continued engagement from government, researchers, and the women Veteran community will be essential to ensure that the recommendations of the *Invisible No More* report translate into measurable improvements in the lives of Canadian women Veterans.

THANK YOU

to everyone who made this workshop possible, and first and foremost to the women Veterans who participated in our workshop!

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Resources for Continued Engagement

[Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs \(SICEMA\)](#)

A research centre at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax that contributes to research, student training, policy, and public debate on military, defence, and veteran issues through a focus on sex, gender, and intersectionality, culture and community, and social innovation.

[House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs \(ACVA\)](#)

Committee mandated to study Veterans' issues. Veterans may submit briefs or request to testify.

[Invisible No More Project](#)

Community-engaged research and advocacy initiative at Mount Saint Vincent University supporting implementation of recommendations affecting women Veterans.

[National Association of Federal Retirees \(NAFR\)](#)

Advocacy organization supporting federal retirees and Veterans, including advocacy training initiatives.

[Senate Committee on Security, National Defence and Veterans Affairs \(SECD\)](#)

Committee mandated to study issues related to security, defence, and veterans.

[Standing Committee on National Defence \(NDDN\)](#)

Committee mandated to study issues related to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Standing Committee on the Status of Women \(FEWO\)](#)

Committee mandated to study issues related to women and gender equality.

[Veterans Affairs Canada \(VAC\)](#)

Department responsible for Veteran benefits and services and ongoing consultation and engagement processes.

[Women Veterans Research and Engagement Network \(WREN\)](#)

Network that supports collaboration between researchers, advocacy organizations, and women Veterans.

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House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Invisible No More: The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans. House of Commons of Canada, June 2024.

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