

Magdalena Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2322-0669>
Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland
m.paluszkiewicz-misiaczek@uj.edu.pl

Canadian WWII Veterans Charter as Foundation of Modern Canadian Welfare State

Security and prosperity are regarded as the cornerstones of Canadian society, where the government plays a vital role in establishing the universal social security system, earning the country the designation of a welfare state. The current model has its origins in World War II, particularly with the introduction of a comprehensive program for veteran re-establishment – known as the Veterans Charter. The aim of this paper is to explore the solutions that formed the foundation of the Canadian WWII Veterans Charter and the subsequent impact they had on the development of the welfare state in Canada.

Keywords: veterans, welfare state, social policy, WWII, Veterans Charter

The healthcare and pension systems in Canada are frequently portrayed as exemplary, particularly when contrasted with the scant state protection provided in the USA. Security and prosperity are seen as the cornerstones of Canadian society, and the country is known as a welfare state due to the government's crucial involvement in creating the universal social security system. Canadian citizens and permanent residents can rely on healthcare coverage, known as *Canadian Medicare*, which is administered and funded by the government, with each province and territory responsible for delivering healthcare services to its residents (Martin et al., 2018). They are also

beneficiaries of the public pension system, which consists of two obligatory tiers: a flat-rate pension from the Old Age Security program and an earnings-related pension from the mandatory Canada Pension Plan (CPP). The third tier of Canada's retirement income system consists of voluntary pension savings (Government of Canada).

The foundations of the current model were laid during WWII in connection with the introduction of the comprehensive program of veteran re-establishment, known as the *Veterans Charter*. The general public in North America, however, tends to associate the foundations of modern social care system with the US GI Bill of 1944, not being aware of the fact that the US Veterans' Administration, when preparing the GI Bill, drew heavily on Canadian solutions concerning rehabilitation and re-establishment of veterans, which had been developed in Canada in the first two years of the war (Tremblay, "The Right..." 11; Robson, Nares, 46). The aim of this paper is to present the solutions that formed the core of the Canadian WWII Veterans Charter and the influence they wielded on the development of Canadian welfare state.

At the outbreak of WWII, both society and government authorities well remembered the social and economic turmoil that followed WWI, as well as the limited number of meager government assistance programs provided to returning veterans and the families of the deceased. The image of the entire "lost generation" of disillusioned and troublesome former soldiers was still vivid. Thus, during WWII Canadian federal government began preparations for smooth postwar transition almost immediately after the outbreak of the conflict. Already on 20 October 1939, Ian Mackenzie, the newly appointed Minister of Pensions and Health, wrote to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, urging that the country should immediately focus on the challenges that would arise after the war (Blake, 37). The first step in this respect was taken on 8 December 1939, when the Special Committee on Demobilization and Re-establishment was formed. The Minister of Pensions and Health also decided to establish an advisory body of leading Canadian intellectuals, especially economists and social policy specialists, who were to prepare predictions concerning social and economic implications of the transition from war to peace.

The advisory body, formally recognized in 1941 as the General Advisory Committee on Demobilization and Rehabilitation (GACDR), emphasized from the very beginning that successful demobilization and reintegration of the armed forces into civilian society would require broader social reform. "Our men are fighting for Canada [...] and we must realize and recognize that the remaking of Canada will constitute the major post-war

reconstruction into which all our rehabilitation plans must be shaped and function," stated the Minister of Pensions and Health in his House of Commons speech (Blake, 37). The General Advisory Committee was further divided into subcommittees that concentrated on various aspects of veteran care and post-war reintegration. All people entrusted with the task of creating the veteran re-establishment plan were to bear in mind that "the ex-Service man of this war will ask for the opportunity to grow, to learn, to manage, to achieve" (England, 44).

It is worth noting that during WWII, the task of building the system of veteran care was generally placed in the hands of former soldiers. This was a significant advancement compared with the previous conflict when decisions pertaining to veterans were made by civilians – typically patronage appointees who lacked military experience. Those who fought in WWI were rightly considered to possess the experience necessary to help answer the fundamental question: "What does the country owe to those who, forsaking everything, offered their lives in its defence - to try and compensate for the time that was lost and the opportunities that were missed?" (Woods, 9). In accordance with this policy, the head of the General Advisory Committee became Brigadier-General H.F. McDonald, a WWI veteran, an amputee, and a member of the War Amputations of Canada. Therefore, McDonald was more than anyone else aware of the shortcomings of the post-World War I veteran care system (Tremblay, "Lieutenant...", 332).

Similarly, the person primarily responsible for the construction of the WWII veteran reintegration program, Walter S. Woods (Associate Deputy Minister of Pensions and National Health from 1941),¹ was also a WWI veteran who had firsthand knowledge of the difficulties faced by veterans and their families. He served as president of the Great War Veterans' Association (GWVA) in Calgary and, from 1919 to 1930, worked for the Soldier Settlement Board – an agency administering a land settlement scheme for veterans. In 1930, he was appointed Chairman of the War Veterans' Allowance Board, administering allowances for veterans of WWI who became unemployable and destitute – the so-called "burned-out pensions" (Neary, 3–7; 19–20). An ex-serviceman himself, Walter Woods could easily understand the standpoint of veterans. During his work at the War Veterans' Allowance Board, he developed the philosophy of trust toward former soldiers, stating in his writing: "... the great majority of veterans would much rather work than receive relief in any form from the State" (Woods, 16). His

¹ In 1944, Prime Minister Mackenzie King decided to separate the Department of Veterans Affairs from the Ministry of Pensions and National Health.

guiding principle when drafting legislation for veteran care was to provide long-term state support for disabled veterans and the dependents of those who died, while compensating able-bodied veterans for missed opportunities and providing them with the resources to make a fresh start.

Not only were the high-ranking executive posts occupied by former WWI soldiers, but Wood's policy as the Associate Deputy Minister of Pensions and National Health was to recruit veterans with disabilities as employees of the Ministry responsible for assisting other disabled veterans. He believed that "a man who has been seriously disabled and who has regained control [...] and mastered the ordinary functions of life despite his disability can, by his mental attitude and his physical mastery of handicaps, be a tremendous inspiration to others" (Woods, 9).

The first veterans who came to Canada during the conflict were, of course, those who were wounded or became seriously ill while on duty in Europe. According to military statistics, from the beginning of the war until December 1945, a total of 40,468 army personnel were repatriated to Canada from overseas for medical reasons (Feasby, 423). To provide the best medical care for the wounded, the Department of Veterans Affairs determined that doctors employed by Army Medical Services could be hired on a part-time basis. Therefore, many of them could combine their work for the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) with an academic career or private practice. In this way, veterans gained access to the most recent advancements in medicine, such as antibiotics, rehabilitation of spinal cord injuries, insulin and sub-insulin shock therapy, the use of curare in anesthesia, and the development of prosthetics (Tremblay, "The Right ...", 17).

Medical facilities administered by the Department of National Defence (DND) were divided into four classes: active treatment hospitals; health and occupational centers; special treatment centers; and veterans' homes. Active treatment hospitals were spread across Canada and offered a full range of medical and surgical treatment. Health and occupational centers, which served during the war as places where convalescent soldiers could recuperate before returning to their units, provided convalescence for veterans after the war. Such facilities, located in attractive settings away from a hospital atmosphere, offered a planned program of physical rehabilitation, along with group exercise, sports, and handicrafts. Upon release from such a center veterans were expected to return to their regular jobs. Eight special treatment centers were established to provide programs for specific medical conditions, including spinal cord injuries (the first in the world), neuropsychiatric conditions, tuberculosis, and arthritis. Additionally, the Department of National Defence provided treatment services at

seven veterans' homes for aging WWI veterans who required domiciliary care (Tremblay, "The Right ...", 13). In subsequent years, health and occupational centers served as a model for civilian rehabilitation centers, while veterans' homes became the foundation for the emerging field of geriatric medicine, which began developing in the late 1950s.

At the end of the war, another novel solution was introduced – the so-called "Doctor of Choice Plan". This innovation made it possible for veterans living in isolated locations far from military hospital centers to continue receiving basic medical care from local doctors, with the DVA paying for the treatments. The Doctor of Choice Plan decreased the demand for medical services in veterans' hospitals and the need to rapidly build new ones. Veterans' medical services, under the jurisdiction of the federal government, provided an opportunity to develop a model of a national health system. At the end of 1945, the Minister of Veterans Affairs reported to Parliament that the Department was "... giving a modified health insurance service to more than 650,000, or approximately one-third of Canada's male working population" (Mackenzie, 593).

One of the most significant Canadian examples of the new approach to disabled veterans were changes in the rehabilitation and treatment of soldiers with spinal cord injuries. Progress in medicine reduced mortality rates among such individuals from 80% during WWI to 10% in 1946 (Tremblay "Lieutenant...", 322). At the beginning of WWII, hardly anyone believed that paralyzed people could re-enter the community, let alone their workplaces. The change in attitude in this respect is a consequence of life experience and the activities of Lieutenant John Counsell, a Canadian soldier who sustained a spinal cord injury during the ill planned Dieppe landing in 1942. In 1945, he founded the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) – the first of its kind in the world, organized and administered by the individuals with spinal cord injuries (W. Boyce et al., 16). He knew from his own experience that gaining the possibility to be independent was critical in the process of returning to society. Before 1945, wheelchairs, referred to at that time as "invalid chairs", were believed to be designed only for patient transportation and not for independent mobility. John Counsell initiated a successful campaign to provide veterans with spinal cord injuries or leg amputations with folding, self-propelled wheelchairs (Everest and Jennings wheelchairs) and to fit their automobiles with hand controls (Tremblay, "Lieutenant ...", 346).

In 1949, experiments with motorized wheelchairs began to help quadriplegic veterans achieve greater independence. The project was taken up by George Klein, a renowned Canadian inventor, who in 1953 presented

a prototype of a chair that could drive forward, reverse, turn, and be operated by the patient with the slightest finger pressure. "The Klein chair" immediately became recognized for its remarkable maneuverability. In 1954, the DVA ordered 20 such chairs for 20 of Canada's most seriously disabled veterans; each chair cost \$500 (Bourgeois-Doyle, 176). Other countries quickly expressed interest in the invention, especially the US Veterans Administration. To help injured individuals worldwide—both soldiers and civilians—achieve greater mobility, Canada decided to freely share the technology.²

Between 1945 and 1948, more than 29,000 seriously disabled veterans participated in various programs prepared by the DVA. By 1948, 35% were enrolled in training or treatment programs, and 65% were already employed (Tremblay, "Going...", 161). In many instances, if those soldiers had been civilians, their disabilities would have led to unemployment and social marginalization. Due to the high success rate of rehabilitating and re-integrating handicapped WWII soldiers, Canadian policy for physically disabled civilian citizens was re-examined in the late 1940s.

The range of programs prepared in Canada for WWII veterans was much broader in comparison to solutions introduced after WWI. Veterans of the 1914–1918 conflict could count on limited help if wounded or disabled. Former soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force who remained able-bodied after WWI could only qualify for a soldier settlement program entitling them to buy 160 acres of land, on the condition that they could pay 10% of the maximum \$4,500 purchase price. The remaining sum was to be repaid in 20 years with an interest rate of 5% (Morton, Wright, 102–104). In the early 1920s, when veterans were buying their farms, land prices were high; however, they dropped toward the end of the decade. Thus, in subsequent years, veterans had to pay off loans that could be even 50% higher than the actual value of their property. Consequently, 80% of farming veterans went bankrupt within the first five years (Keshen, 64).

Following World War II, Canada's social climate and economic circumstances underwent a radical shift. Great Depression helped to convince a large number of people that social welfare was a "public good and not a temporary evil" (Granatstein, Oliver, 433). During the war, Keynesian interventionism and government social welfare began to be seen as tools to prevent the return of post-war stagnation and depression (Keshen, 62).

² The visual presentation of the model can be seen in the CBC film: *The Greatest Canadian Invention - Where Would We Be Without It?*, directed by Mark Starowicz, 2007.

The government felt compelled to prepare the system of care not only for disabled veterans, but for all those "... whose lives were interrupted by the service to their country" (Woods, 13). The preparation of a comprehensive and broad system of veteran care, which commenced at the beginning of the conflict, helped to ensure public support for the mobilization of resources for the war. The public generally supported government intervention and the introduction of social security legislation that aimed to prevent the return of post-WWI problems.

Building a comprehensive veteran care system, which became known as the Veterans Charter after WWII, began with the issuance of Order PC7633 (Post Discharge and Re-establishment Order) on October 1, 1941. The order marked a significant advancement compared to post-WWI provisions, as it specified that everyone who served, not only disabled veterans and families of fallen soldiers, would qualify for government help. The order's provisions stipulated that military service would constitute insurable employment under the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1940 (Neary, Granatstein, 6). In subsequent years, other acts and orders helped to build the policy, with the central core being to give veterans "opportunity with security" (Appendix two: Back to Civil Life, 249-250). Former soldiers were guaranteed the right to resume their old employment or obtain a comparable job from their previous employer after the end of military service. Those interested in work in agriculture could apply for benefits under the Veterans' Land Act of 1942. Under the 1944 War Service Grant Act, all soldiers were entitled to payment of a gratuity, the amount of which depended on the length and place of service. Vocational retraining for a period equal to the time a veteran had spent in uniform, or the possibility of free university education, was guaranteed under the 1945 Veterans Rehabilitation Act. Subsidized loans to start a business could also be obtained in accordance with the provisions of the 1946 Veterans' Business and Professional Loans Act.

Toward the end of the war, the Department of National Defense arranged a number of sessions for soldiers waiting to be shipped to Canada to inform veterans about all the benefits that the DVA provided. Additionally, military publications like *Maple Leaf* and *Khaki* carried columns explaining DVA policies and describing opportunities established for veterans (Keshen, 68). Information for soldiers was also channeled through the National Film Board with upbeat productions such as *Home to the Land* and *Road to Civvy Street*.³ Additionally, the Wartime Information Board distrib-

³ Examples of educational films — Vincent Paquette, *Road to Civvy Street*, 1945, explaining various programs and services available through the Canadian

uted millions of flyers, posters, and booklets. Among them was the booklet *Back to Civil Life*, which in very simple words summarized the provisions of all statutes and regulations composing the Veteran Charter. Its foreword stressed the main aim of the veteran policy: "The object of Canada's plan for the rehabilitation of her armed forces is that every man or woman discharged from the forces shall be in a position to earn a living" (Neary, Granatstein, 249), thus promising former soldiers a fishing pole rather than the fish. The system was to offer veterans the opportunities and security necessary for full post-war re-establishment.

Upon return to Canada, every soldier underwent a medical examination to establish disability claims. Subsequently, demobilized soldiers received free train transportation to the destination of their choice. Within one month, formal discharge took place at the military depot closest to their place of stay. During that time, the payments to which every returning veteran was entitled were calculated, including any back or deferred pay, the so-called "rehabilitation grant" (amounting to one month's pay), gratuity payments (\$7.50 per month spent in the Western Hemisphere, \$15 per month spent overseas, irrespective of rank), a \$100 voucher for civilian clothing, and a \$100 bonus for winners of gallantry medals. On average, cash payouts amounted to \$700 and were paid in monthly installments, not exceeding the amount of one month's pay while in the military. In the case of fallen soldiers, the War Service Gratuity and unpaid balance were paid to the dependents or, when the deceased had no dependents, to other "persons legally entitled to receive it" (Appendix two: *Back to Civil Life*, 259–260).

At the military depots close to their place of residence, former soldiers could also begin the application process for benefits from the variety of opportunities provided by the Veterans Charter. As mentioned earlier, returning veterans had the resumption of pre-war employment guaranteed by law. However, if they were dissatisfied with their previous employment or had not held a job when enlisting, they could choose the retraining program known as Canadian Vocational Training. This was organized by the DVA and the Department of Labour in cooperation with the provinces and municipalities and was sponsored by federal funds. The program provided opportunities for training in 100 occupations. Most courses lasted

government to help World War II veterans re-establish themselves in civilian life, https://www.nfb.ca/film/the_road_to_civvy_street, 10 May 2025; and Stanley Jackson, *Home to the Land*, 1944, picturing the possibilities of The Veteran's Land Act, https://www.nfb.ca/film/home_to_the_land, 10 May 2025.

no longer than one year, and within that time, the trainee was paid a living allowance depending on marital status and the number of dependents. The sums ranged from \$60 to \$154 and could be supplemented by wages earned in a part-time job (Keshen, 73). By 1951, over 80,000 veterans had passed through the program, and according to the statistics, after six years, only 10% of trainees did not get a job (Woods, 107-109).

Another option, designed for those "... whose university careers were interrupted by enlistment" or "... whose qualifications are acceptable to an accredited university", was to apply for the university education program. An eligible veteran was granted payment of university fees plus a maintenance grant "... for as many months as the veteran has served in the Forces" (Neary, Granatstein, 129). In this way, a veteran who had served for two years was eligible for 24 months of tuition—approximately three academic years. After the entitlement period, the successful veterans could apply for an extension of assistance and payment of supplementary grants allowing completion of university education (Neary, Granatstein, 129). It was a very expensive program, yet it was seen as one of the best investments of the country. According to a government press communiqué, "The country [...] needs to train, encourage, and retrain every scholar it can find, for they constitute the principal group who will keep Canada up with a rapidly changing world" (Woods, 107).

Both able-bodied and, perhaps more importantly, disabled veterans benefited greatly from retraining and higher education programs. The Department of Veterans Affairs' Casualty Rehabilitation Section established customized rehabilitation programs tailored to each veteran's needs in order to offer them all-encompassing assistance. In contrast to the post-World War I era, when disabled veterans were only entitled to training or education equivalent to their pre-enlistment employment, post-World War II disabled veterans were eligible to attend a university or technical school. Specially appointed District Casualty Rehabilitation Officers (DCROs) provided the disabled with full information on a range of entitlements. They were also responsible for solving issues such as priority purchase of cars, acquiring funds for additional rehabilitation equipment, or housing modifications (Boyce et al., 16). The DCROs' goal, many of whom were disabled veterans themselves, was to help other disabled individuals return to regular jobs in competitive industry. Thus, it was also their task to identify possible job openings, develop links with business and industry, and educate the public about the abilities of those who became handicapped in the course of the war. For this purpose, various exhibitions were held across the country with disabled veterans demonstrating their

skills. Additionally, numerous publications outlining general philosophy of casualty rehabilitation and publicizing successful case histories were released.⁴

Veterans coming from rural areas and having experience in agriculture could take up the opportunities offered by the 1942 Veterans' Land Act. The Act was designed as a "flexible measure" and allowed interested veterans to consider one of three establishment options: "(a) full-time farming for men with practical experience in farm operation; (b) a small holding settlement, which means a rural home and small acreage located close to employment opportunities; (c) a small holding settlement, coupled with commercial fishing in Canada's coastal regions or inland districts where fishing is engaged in on a commercial basis" (The Veterans' Land Act, 4). The provisions of the Act started operating after the war to give all interested veterans equal opportunities for acquiring land. Its recipients could get up to \$6,000 for the purchase of land at a 3.5% interest rate amortized over 20 years. Upon the purchase of the property, the veteran was "... required to make a down payment of 10 percent of its value". If the veteran paid off rates for a period of ten years, he received title to the property, and the government annulled the remaining part of the debt, usually between 30–40% of the value of the property (The Veterans' Land Act, 8–12).

The whole system was much better organized than after the previous war. Applicants were better screened for their agricultural experience, the locations of farms were proposed by the veterans themselves, and the DVA ensured that the land was sold to them at market value. The success of the program was also largely due to good crop prices in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Keshen, 75) and the fact that provisions of the Act allowed veterans to acquire small plots (2–5 acres for the able-bodied, 0.5-acre hobby farms for the disabled) and combine farming with any other forms of gainful employment (Shulist). The fact that the choice did not need to be made right away was another element that contributed to its success. The leaflet *Back to Civil Life* stated: "The Act does not set a terminating date, and it is expected that settlement will be spread over the period of several years. Veterans have been urged and are still urged in their own interest not to rush into settlement" (Appendix two: Back to Civil Life, 271). Thus,

⁴ Typical examples of such publications: E. E. Dunlop, "Disability vs. 'Can-Do'", *Manufacturing and Industrial Engineering* No. 9, 1945, p. 30–40; G. Hawelcke, "They Walk ... Though Paralyzed", *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 February, 1946; "Employment of Canada's Disabled - Veterans and Others", *Department of Veterans Affairs*, Ottawa, 1948.

former soldiers taking up the possibilities offered by the Veterans' Land Act had enough time to prepare for the decision, find the land suiting their preferences, and negotiate the best price.

Those "ex-servicemen and women who do not choose to take educational, vocational, or technical training or benefits under the Veterans' Land Act" (Appendix two: Back to Civil Life, 260) were entitled to receive the so-called "re-establishment credit". The amount a particular veteran could receive was calculated on the basis of the duration and place of service in the same way as the gratuity had been—\$7.50 for each 30-day period plus 35 cents for each day served overseas—and was tax-free (Appendix two: Back to Civil Life, 260–261). Technically speaking, the payment was a grant rather than a loan because it was non-repayable, but it had to be used for the widely recognized goal of re-establishment, i.e., acquisition of a home, modernization of an already owned home, paying off a mortgage or any other encumbrance on a home owned by a veteran or by the veteran's spouse, and purchase of furniture, household equipment, or tools and equipment for trade, profession, or business (Appendix two: Back to Civil Life, 260).

Additional significant benefits offered to veterans included preferential treatment when buying homes and apartments, as well as the ability to obtain advantageous loans to launch their own businesses under the 1946 Veterans' Business and Professional Loans Act. Based on the 1944 National Housing Act, a veteran could acquire property costing up to \$4,000 (the cost of a typical house) with a 10% down payment. For the remainder, the new Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation offered mortgages at 5% interest and a 25-year term. This meant that monthly payments for a house amounted to just over \$22 (Keshen, 72).

As can be seen from the above-mentioned data, most of Canada's WWII veterans were welcomed home with open arms and provided with the best possible assistance in putting their lives back in order. Still, groups such as First Nations soldiers and merchant seamen found themselves ignored and denied due recognition and benefits.

The package of benefits prepared for returning veterans based on the provisions of the Veterans Charter was theoretically fully available to all First Nation soldiers. However, in practice, access to information, advice, and benefits for First Nations veterans, particularly Status Indians living on reserves, was limited. These servicemen were forced to rely on Indian agents as crucial intermediaries and did not receive assistance from Veterans Affairs counsellors. Many Aboriginal veterans suffered from a severe lack of information because Indian agents typically only had rudimentary

awareness of the benefits available to former soldiers. Thus, they did not take advantage of the benefits, education and job opportunities, or access to hospitals and rehabilitation services. They were also unaware of the provisions of the Veterans' Land Act allowing Indian veterans to purchase land off-reserve without losing their Indian status (Sweeny, 68).

The government took up the problem of Aboriginal veterans only in 1995, after the release of two government reports concerning their grievances. In 2000, the National Roundtable on Aboriginal Veterans was launched, and after lengthy and difficult negotiations, it was decided in 2002 that the Canadian government would allocate \$39 million for WWI, WWII, and the Korean War First Nations veterans or their widows. Each applicant was to become eligible for a maximum of \$20,000 in compensation (Ellis, 14-15). First Nations former soldiers found the compensation package inadequate, as it gave veterans and their widows only four months to complete the application process. No other relatives of the deceased veterans could benefit. Additionally, the payments did not compensate Aboriginal servicemen for the deprivation of business and education opportunities. Nevertheless, they agreed to accept it and between 2003–2004, 1,298 applicants were identified as legitimate recipients of that compensation package (Ellis, 15).

Often referred to as "the fourth arm of the fighting services" (Boileau), merchant navy civilian sailors who operated crucial supply ships throughout the war comprised another impoverished veteran category. Although merchant seamen contributed enormously to the final victorious outcome of the Battle of the Atlantic, after the war they were denied the status of veterans and attendant benefits, including pensions. One of the reasons behind this decision was Canada's desire to keep its merchant fleet operational for post-war shipping. Minister of Transport Lionel Chevrier wrote: "Such benefits should not be of a nature which would encourage seamen to leave the industry at the end of the war to seek employment in other fields as the services of many skilled seamen will be required if Canada is to maintain a Merchant Marine after the war" (Boileau). Merchant navy sailors never served under military discipline, were paid slightly better than the military, and could withdraw from service at any time (Granatstein, Oliver, 433). It was only in 1992 that merchant mariners were finally granted official status as veterans and became eligible to receive disability pensions, allowances, and healthcare benefits accorded to veterans of the three armed services. In 2000, following a dramatic hunger strike by four Merchant Navy veterans on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Merchant Navy veterans and surviving spouses became entitled to receive a compensation package (Merchant Navy Veteran Special Benefit) to make up for the

lost opportunities. More than 7,000 applicants, including veterans from WWII and the Korean War, qualified for payments ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000, depending on the length of service under the Merchant Navy Veteran Special Benefit (Wigmore, 32).

The above-mentioned programs provided nearly a million Canadian veterans, both male and female, with unprecedented possibilities for social advancement. After 1945, thanks to meticulous planning and the allocation of large funds for veteran services and benefits, there was no recurrence of the societal unrest that had followed World War I. The transition from war to peace was smooth, and the country went from “strength to strength” (Neary, Granatstein, 12). Benefits granted by the DVA “created a spending stream” that helped to “counteract the anticipated postwar slump and [...] promote a more dynamic economy by enhancing the skills of the labor force” (Keshen, 78). Of course, like all major pieces of legislation, the Veterans Charter had its weaknesses and inconsistencies, especially regarding the treatment of First Nations and merchant sailors. Still, the package offered to Canadian veterans was considered to be probably the most far-sighted in the world. It was “internationally second to none” (Granatstein, Oliver, 433). The WWII Veterans Charter helped to redefine Canada’s approach to care for disabled veterans, widows, and children of fallen soldiers, as well as those ex-servicemen for whom post-war reintegration proved particularly difficult. Because the philanthropic approach, largely based on various charitable initiatives, was ineffective during WWI and in the post-war period, it was replaced by government intervention. In this way, the concept of social services provided by the state was born. Pioneering solutions in preventive medicine, occupational therapy, care of the elderly, and family benefits, which were first introduced to cater to the needs of veterans, were subsequently developed into social welfare measures that covered all Canadians.

References

- “Appendix two: Back to Civil Life.” *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, edited by Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998, pp. 246-290.
- Blake, Raymond B. *From Rights to Needs: A History of Family Allowances in Canada, 1929-92*. Vancouver, 2009.
- Boileau, John. “Canada’s Merchant Navy: The Men That Saved The World.” *Legion Magazine*, 14 July 2010, <https://legionmagazine.com/canadas-merchant-navy-the-men-that-saved-the-world/>. Accessed: October 10, 2025.

- Bourgeois-Doyle, Richard. *George J. Klein: The Great Inventor*. Ottawa, 2004.
- Boyce, William, Mary Tremblay, Mary Ann McColl, Jerome Bickenbach, Anne Crichton, Steven Andrews, Nancy Gerein, and April D'Aubin. *A Seat at the Table: Persons with Disabilities and Policy Making*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.
- Dunlop, Edward E. "Disability vs. 'Can-Do'." *Manufacturing and Industrial Engineering*, no. 9, 1945, pp. 30-40.
- Ellis, Neil R. *Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition*, "Employment of Canada's Disabled — Veterans and Others." *Department of Veterans Affairs*, Ottawa, 1948.
- England, Robert. *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1943.
- Feasby, William R. *Official History Of The Canadian Medical Services, 1939-1945, Vol. 1: Organizations and Campaigns*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953.
- Government of Canada, "Canada Pension Plan." 9 May 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/pension-plan.html>. Accessed: October 10, 2025.
- Granatstein, J.L., and Dean F. Oliver. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Hawelcke, Greg. "They Walk... Though Paralyzed." *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 February 1946.
- Keshen, Jeff. "Getting It Right the Second Time Around: The Reintegration of Canadian Veterans of World War II." *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, edited by Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, pp. 62-84.
- Kłos, Bożena. "Kanadyjski system emerytalny." *Analizy BAS*, vol. 83, no. 16, 2012, [http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/WydBAS.nsf/0/23E2E00519A32391C1257A9F0030279D/\\$file/Analiza_BAS_2012_83.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/WydBAS.nsf/0/23E2E00519A32391C1257A9F0030279D/$file/Analiza_BAS_2012_83.pdf).
- Mackenzie, Ian. "Administrative Experience in the Department of Veterans' Affairs." *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 53, 1945, p. 593.
- Martin, Danielle, Ashley P. Miller, Amélie Quesnel-Vallée, Nadine R. Caron, Bilkis Vissandjée, and Gregory P. Marchildon. "Canada's Universal Health-Care System: Achieving Its Potential." *The Lancet*, vol. 391, 2018, pp. 1718-1735, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)30181-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30181-8).
- "Melbourne Mercer Global Pension Index." *Australian Centre for Financial Studies, MERCER*, October 2015, <https://assets.retirement.govt.nz/public/Uploads/2016-Review-Of-Retirement-Income-Policies/International-Picture/91dde3bf89/709-International-Picture-Mercer-Global-Pension-Index-2015.pdf>.
- Morton, Desmond, and Glenn Wright. *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life 1915-1930*. Toronto-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Neary, Peter, and J.L. Granatstein, editors. *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

- Neary, Peter. *On to Civvy Street: Canada's Rehabilitation Program for Veterans of the Second World War*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.
- "Pensions at a Glance 2013: OECD and G20 Indicators." *OECD*, 26 November 2013, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pensions-at-a-glance-2013_pension_glance-2013-en.html. Accessed: October 10, 2025.
- Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs*. February 2019, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/ACVA/Reports/RP10301835/acvarp11/acvarp11-e.pdf>.
- Robson, Jennifer, and Peter Nares. *Wealth and Well-Being, Ownership and Opportunity: New Directions in Social Policy for Canada*. North York (Ontario): Social and Enterprise Development Innovations, 2006.
- Shulist, Tricia E.G. *"My Little Piddly House And All This Land": The Veterans' Land Act in Canada and the Hamilton Wentworth Region*. McMaster University, 1998, <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/11844>. Accessed: October 10, 2025.
- Sweeny, Alastair. *Government Policy and Saskatchewan Indian Veterans: A Brief History of the Canadian Government's Treatment of Indian Veterans of the Two World Wars*. Ottawa: Tyler, Wright & Daniel Limited, 1979.
- Tremblay, Mary. "Going Back to Civvy Street: A Historical Account of the Impact of the Everest and Jennings Wheelchair for Canadian World War II Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury." *Disability & Society*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1996, pp. 149-169.
- Tremblay, Mary. "Lieutenant John Counsell and the Development of Medical Rehabilitation and Disability Policy in Canada." *Disabled Veterans in History*, edited by David A. Gerber, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012, pp. 322-346.
- Tremblay, Mary. "The Right to the Best Medical Care: Dr. W.P. Warner and the Canadian Department of Veterans Affairs, 1945-55." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1998, pp. 3-25.
- The Veterans' Land Act, 1942: A Summary of Its Aims, Scope and Main Details: Handbook No. 1*. Issued under Authority of Hon. T.A. Crerar, Minister of Mines and Resources, <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5064209>.
- Wigmore, Greg. "A Debt of Shame" Repaid: Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans and Their Struggle for Compensation, <https://www.alliedmerchantnavy.com/amn/documents/a-debt-of-shame-repaid.pdf>. Accessed: October 10, 2025.
- Woods, Walter S. *Rehabilitation (A Combined Operation)*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953.