

Post-CIMVHR Workshop: Advancing the vision for a transformed mental health system for Veterans and their Families

SUMMARY REPORT

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On October 19, 2022, the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families hosted a two-hour workshop entitled, *Advancing the vision for a transformed mental health system for Veterans and their Families*. The event brought together Veterans, Veteran Family members, researchers, government and policy makers, service providers and community experts to discuss the vision described in a recently developed **Conceptual Framework** as well as insights about advancing this vision.

Through a panel presentation, audience engagement, and small group discussions, the event aimed to:

1. Inform attendees about the vision shared in the Conceptual Framework, including what it is, why it was created, as well as key benefits and priorities;
2. Improve understanding about the relevance and applicability of this vision; and
3. Identify and understand stakeholder needs and perspectives for advancing this vision.

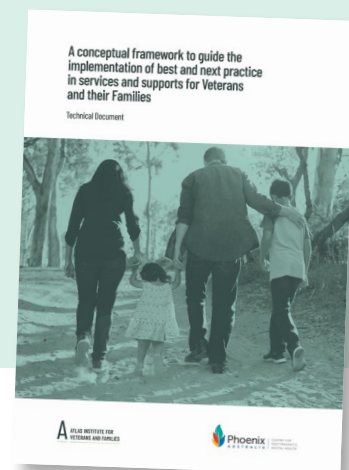
BY THE NUMBERS

A total of 29 people, including Veterans, Veteran Family members, researchers, service providers and government staff, attended the event.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual Framework, co-developed by the Atlas Institute and Phoenix Australia, describes an aspirational yet attainable vision for a transformed mental health system for Veterans and their Families. Seven key principles guide this vision:

- Respect and dignity
- Engagement and involvement
- Equity of access
- Breadth of support
- High-quality treatment and care
- Economically responsible
- Whole-person outcomes



WHAT WE HEARD

The section summarizes the overarching themes shared by event attendees in relation to:

1. Specific **actions** that people can take over the next year to help advance the vision;
2. Potential **challenges** to these actions; and
3. Possible **solutions** to overcome these challenges.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list. The Framework offers ideas for several other tangible actions, as well as outlining additional challenges and solutions that may be relevant in the Canadian context for advancing the vision highlighted in the Framework. The Atlas Institute also recognizes that there may be other unique actions and insights that could be revealed through further engagement and dialogue.

Proposed actions

Attendees identified three key areas of action over the next 12 months: (1) **engagement**, (2) **knowledge and awareness** and (3) **monitoring and evaluation**:

- **Engage people with lived experience** to encourage them to share and advocate for the vision.
- **Encourage others to learn more** about the vision, both within existing networks and more broadly.
- **Increase knowledge of military life** among key groups such as service providers, researchers, government staff and the general public.
- **Inform key groups** across multiple levels, such as elected representatives and other community champions or decision-makers, about the existence of the vision via targeted outreach and media engagement.
- **Establish feedback channels** for people who access and read the Framework to share their reflections about key aspects of the vision (e.g. feasibility, gaps).
- **Ensure monitoring and evaluation** procedures among key groups (e.g. service providers) to guide implementation of the vision.

Potential challenges

Attendees identified a range of potential challenges at the **micro** (i.e. individual), **meso** (i.e. organizational) and **macro** (i.e. system) levels:

- **Power dynamics (MICRO):** People with lived experience are crucial for advancing the vision, yet there can be an informal hierarchy of power within the mental health system. This hierarchy can make it difficult for Veterans and Veteran Family members to meaningfully engage with decision makers and advocate for change.
- **Capacity limitations (MICRO/MESO):** There are capacity limitations to implementing system changes, including human resources as well as monetary and other resources (e.g. time, supplies, infrastructure). For example, the time and energy required for Veterans and Veteran Families to meaningfully engage and participate. Likewise, monitoring and evaluation, which is crucial for implementing the vision, also requires monetary and resource investment.
- **Lack of cross-system communication (MESO/MACRO):** There are gaps in communication between service providers as well as across services and government departments in the Veteran care network more broadly.
- **Inertia and lack of mechanisms for change (MACRO):** There is awareness but no action (that is, problems with the current system have been identified, but by and large adequate solutions have yet to materialize). Certain policies and incentives can actually limit innovation within the wider system, coupled with an absence of policies to encourage it.

Possible solutions

Attendees identified a range of potential solutions to help overcome the identified challenges:

- **Increase capacity** for people with lived experience to engage with key decision makers. This can help overcome some of the identified challenges, such as power dynamics and capacity limitations.
- **Implement feedback loops and communication channels** across all groups (service providers, government departments, Veterans and their Families, and other decision makers). This can help overcome all challenges identified.
- **Identify and implement facilitators**, in addition to addressing barriers (i.e. factors that promote or hinder action, respectively). Some examples of facilitators outlined in the Framework are fostering community champions and other informal leaders, delivering capacity-building programs, or developing specific tools to monitor change. This can help overcome challenges related to capacity as well as inertia.

CURRENT WORK AND NEXT STEPS

The Atlas Institute's work aligns with and supports many of the actions and solutions identified. We have summarized some key initiatives that are underway. Together, these activities can promote meaningful engagement and capacity building, help address and minimize power dynamics, increase opportunities for communication and feedback, and support monitoring and evaluation initiatives:

- We recently developed an **engagement framework** to help enhance understanding of how Veterans and Veteran Families want to be engaged. The framework also provides guidance to organizational leaders, policy-makers, service providers, researchers, and others within the sector. We will be doing more to share and inform about this framework in the coming months.
- Our **network of networks approach** creates an interconnected web of key groups, including researchers, service providers, Veterans and Veteran Family members.

- In the next year, we plan to undertake work focused on strengthening our connections and broadening communication channels with Veteran Families across Canada.
- We aim to ensure **knowledge and information** are widely available, accessible, and usable through a process called knowledge mobilization. We are also working to support service providers and organizations through a variety of evidence-based implementation resources and **training opportunities**.
- **Atlas-led and Atlas-partnered research** projects aim to improve collective understanding and inform systemic changes in mental health care for Veterans and their Families. Part of our ongoing research agenda specifically focuses on identifying and understanding improvements to existing and emerging treatments and therapies.

Stay tuned to learn more about how the Atlas Institute will continue to work towards supporting the implementation of these actions and solutions in the coming years.

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

If you wish to provide input or contributions to identifying additional key actions, barriers and solutions for advancing the vision outlined in the Conceptual Framework, we welcome you to do so via [this form](#). The form will remain active until June 30, 2023.

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Disclaimer: Views and opinions expressed are solely those of the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families and may not reflect the views and opinions of the Government of Canada.



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