ATLAS INSTITUTE
FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE 2026 MATCH

MENTAL HEALTH FOR THE MILITARY, VETERANS AND FAMILIES

*In June 2026, the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families hosted a **Global Leadership Exchange** Match focused on strengthening international collaboration and knowledge exchange related to military, Veteran and Family mental health and well-being.*

The two-day Match, held in Wakefield, QC, featured presentations, panel discussions, facilitated dialogue and an experiential learning activity.

Building on relationships established through virtual meetings with the group to date, participants built an agenda around the topic of **flourishing through service**.

ATTENDEES

THE MATCH INCLUDED PARTICIPANTS FROM:

- Canada
- United States
- Netherlands
- Wales

PARTICIPANTS REPRESENTED:

- Veterans and Family members
- Military leaders and serving members
- Researchers and academics
- Health and mental health professionals
- Government representatives
- Policy and program leaders
- Community organizations

LIVED EXPERIENCE PANEL: FLOURISHING THROUGH SERVICE

PANELLISTS

Commodore Kelly Williamson, Royal Canadian Navy
Andrew Lloyd, Veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces
Paige Watts, Veteran Family member

MODERATORS

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Brian McKenna, National Strategic Advisor, Veterans
MaryAnn Notarianni, Deputy CEO and Executive Vice-President, Knowledge Mobilization

A panel of people with lived expertise explored what it means to build a meaningful life after service, highlighting the need to rebuild identity and navigate posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury and the transition to post-service life. Panellists identified gaps in formal bureaucratic systems and emphasized the importance of community networks, affordable childcare, stronger supports for spouses, greater collaboration among non-profits and upstream interventions — including early resource “toolboxes,” dual-intake models for Families and relationship-based case management.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITY: PEPPER POD SITE VISIT

Match attendees visited the **Pepper Pod** in Wakefield, QC. Founder Sandra Perron discussed themes emerging from Lifeshop workshops the Pepper Pod hosts with women Veterans and Family members. Sandra described the importance of connection between women Veterans, especially given the reality of being geographically separated from fellow servicewomen, and the Pepper Pod's work to help women process their experience and "find their tribe" post-service.

CONCLUSION

> *The Match brought together diverse international perspectives to examine how we can better support the well-being of military members, Veterans and Families.*

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- There is a need to move beyond a traditional focus on mental illness and treatment toward **a broader understanding of flourishing that recognizes the importance of purpose, belonging, relationships, social connection and overall quality of life.**
- **Families, caregivers, peers and communities are critical to promoting resilience, recovery and long-term well-being,** reinforcing the need for Family-centred approaches, relationship-based care, prevention and early intervention.
- **International collaboration is key to challenging assumptions, identifying shared priorities and learning from diverse approaches** across countries and sectors. Many of the opportunities and challenges were consistent across different systems and contexts, underscoring the importance of continued cross-national partnership.

PARTICIPANTS AGREED TO:

- Continue exploring flourishing as a framework for Veteran well-being
- Strengthen Family-centred approaches
- Promote prevention and early intervention
- Advance relationship-centred care models
- Continue international knowledge exchange
- Elevate lived experience perspectives
- Maintain collaboration through regular virtual engagement

The Match highlighted participants' commitment to translating shared knowledge into meaningful action, with these priorities providing a foundation for future research, policy and practice.

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