

**National Reintegration Policies and Long-Term Employment Outcomes for
Medically Released Veterans**

To what extent has vocational rehabilitation under the New Veterans Charter improved the economic reintegration of Canadian Armed Forces veterans since 2006?

IB Subject of Essay: Economics and History

Word Count: ~ 3982

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Introduction

Every year, thousands of members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) leave military service and begin a second life as civilians. Upon release, veterans must adapt to a civilian labour market in which their military qualifications and experiences may not be directly applicable. Difficulties during this transition can result in reduced earnings, psychological distress, housing insecurity, and, in more severe cases, homelessness. These challenges have made veterans' reintegration an important concern of Canadian public policy, particularly for individuals whose military careers have ended prematurely because of injury or illness.

Reintegration encompasses several interconnected dimensions. Social reintegration concerns veterans' ability to rebuild relationships and participate in civilian communities, while psychological reintegration involves adapting to life outside military institutions and managing the emotional consequences of service. Medical reintegration focuses on restoring or managing physical and psychological functioning. Although each dimension can influence an individual's transition, the principal focus of this investigation is economic reintegration, defined through three indicators: participation in the civilian labour market, the sustainability of employment, and financial security following military release.

The economic challenges of reintegration are partly rooted in differences between military and civilian occupational requirements. According to Veterans Affairs Canada's analysis of the 2021 Census, 10.1% of Canadian veterans had not completed secondary school, while 22.1% held a university degree or higher, compared with 27.4% of Canadians generally (Veterans Affairs Canada, Community Health Needs Assessment). Although these differences do not necessarily indicate a lack of professional competence, they suggest that some veterans may encounter difficulties demonstrating qualifications recognized by civilian employers. As technological developments increase demand for specialized skills and formal certification, military experience alone may not guarantee access to suitable civilian occupations. (Statistics Canada, "Life After Service Survey, 2019").

These difficulties have prompted successive efforts by the Canadian government to improve veterans' transition into civilian employment. Historically, veterans' benefits placed substantial emphasis on financial compensation for service-related injuries under the Pension Act. However, the introduction of the New Veterans Charter in 2006 marked a shift toward rehabilitation and civilian re-establishment, with greater emphasis on education, vocational training, and employment assistance. Rather than addressing only the financial consequences of military release, the Charter sought to improve veterans' capacity to achieve economic independence through participation in the civilian workforce. This shift raises an important question about whether greater access to occupational rehabilitation has translated into meaningful improvements in veterans' economic outcomes.

The central research question is therefore: **To what extent has vocational rehabilitation under the New Veterans Charter improved the economic reintegration of Canadian Armed Forces veterans since 2006?**

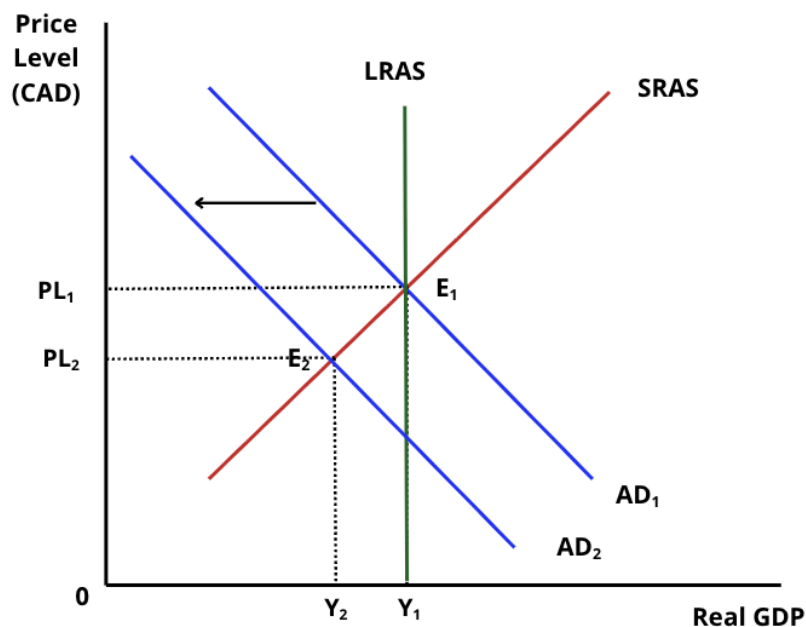
The analysis first considers the extent to which vocational rehabilitation has improved veterans' access to civilian employment before examining the physical, psychological, and social barriers that may restrict its long-term effectiveness. Positive rehabilitation outcomes are evaluated alongside these limitations, followed by consideration of the historical development of financial support. Through this approach, the investigation assesses whether the Charter's achievements in improving employability have been sufficient to facilitate sustainable economic reintegration or whether its effectiveness remains dependent on conditions beyond education and occupational retraining.

Economic Implications of Veteran Unemployment

Although the effect of veterans' unemployment on Canada's aggregate demand is relatively small, the broader economic concern becomes apparent when examining labour force participation. According to Veterans Affairs Canada's analysis of the 2021 Census, approximately 20,050 Canadian veterans were unemployed, while more than 65,000 veterans aged 25 to 65 were outside the labour force Veterans

Affairs Canada, National Veterans Employment Strategy). The latter group includes individuals who were not actively seeking work and therefore were not classified as unemployed, meaning that conventional unemployment statistics alone do not capture the full extent of veterans' economic inactivity. While some may have retired or chosen not to work, others may face physical disabilities, psychological conditions, or barriers that discourage their participation in the civilian workforce. For veterans who remain willing and capable of working with appropriate support, accessible workplaces, disability accommodations, and occupational rehabilitation could help restore employment opportunities and increase their productive contribution. This creates an important consideration for government policy, as effective reintegration may improve veterans' financial independence while reducing the economic costs associated with underutilized labour and continued dependence on income assistance.

Figure 1. Theoretical Impact of Veteran Unemployment on Aggregate Demand and Macroeconomic Equilibrium (AD-AS Model).



The economic implications of these employment difficulties can be illustrated through the aggregate demand and aggregate supply (AD-AS) model. When veterans experience unemployment or

reduced working hours following military release, their employment earnings may decrease, limiting disposable income and household consumption. Since consumption is a component of aggregate demand, this reduction in spending causes a theoretical leftward shift from AD_1 to AD_2 in Figure 1. Assuming short-run aggregate supply (SRAS) remains constant, the economy moves from its initial equilibrium at E_1 to a new equilibrium at E_2 , where both the general price level and real output are lower. If the economy was initially operating at its potential output, this contraction would create a recessionary gap as actual real GDP falls below the level represented by long-run aggregate supply (LRAS). Although the economic impact of veterans' unemployment alone is unlikely to produce a measurable shift in Canada's aggregate demand, the model illustrates how barriers to labour market participation can contribute to underutilized resources and reduced economic activity. Improving veterans' access to sustainable employment could therefore support household consumption and economic participation while reducing the need for income assistance.

The Economic Effects of the 2006 Veterans Charter Act

The economic effects of the New Veterans Charter can be illustrated through the aggregate labour market model. By providing vocational education and occupational retraining, the Charter sought to improve veterans' employability, consistent with human capital theory, which suggests that investment in education and training increases workers' productive capabilities (Becker, 1993).

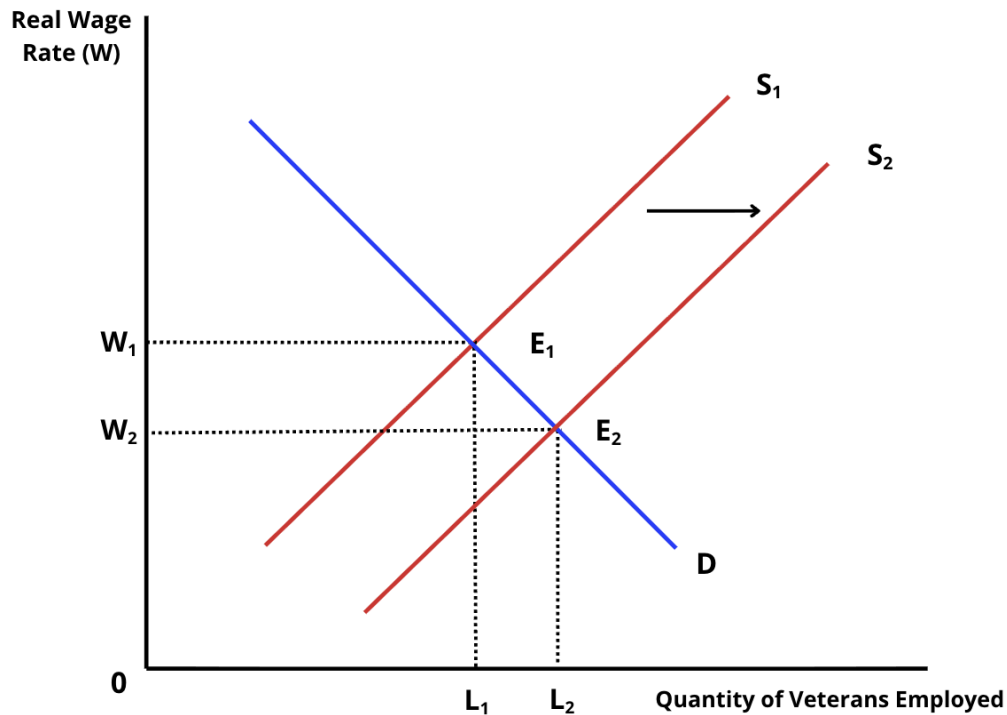


Figure 2: The Effect of the New Veterans Charter on the Aggregate Labour Market

As illustrated in Figure 2, vocational rehabilitation can increase the number of veterans willing and able to enter the civilian workforce, shifting aggregate labour supply rightward from S_1 to S_2 . Assuming labour demand remains constant, the equilibrium quantity of labour employed increases from L_1 to L_2 , while the real wage rate decreases from W_1 to W_2 . This occurs because an increased supply of workers creates a labour surplus at the original wage rate, intensifying competition for employment and placing downward pressure on wages. Lower labour costs subsequently encourage employers to hire additional workers. In the context of the Charter, this represents previously unemployed or economically inactive veterans gaining access to civilian employment through improved qualifications.

Increased employment may generate broader economic benefits as veterans earn wages, increasing household disposable income and consumption expenditure. Greater consumption contributes to aggregate demand, while increased labour participation allows previously underutilized resources to

contribute to national output. Additionally, greater financial independence may reduce veterans' reliance on government income assistance, potentially lowering public expenditure. These effects demonstrate how vocational rehabilitation could improve both veterans' economic reintegration and their contribution to the Canadian economy.

Section I: The Aftermath of the 2006 Veterans Charter

Early evidence following the introduction of the New Veterans Charter suggests that vocational rehabilitation was associated with improvements in veterans' access to civilian employment. The legislation represented a departure from the traditional emphasis on compensation by incorporating programs intended to restore veterans' economic independence through education, career planning, and occupational retraining. Within this framework, successful reintegration increasingly depended on veterans' ability to obtain employment rather than relying exclusively on financial assistance (Office of the Veterans Ombudsman).

Figure 3 presents the proportion of veterans who obtained employment upon completing an Individual Vocational Rehabilitation Plan. This indicator is particularly relevant because it measures an immediate labour market outcome associated with the rehabilitation framework established under the 2006 legislation.



Figure 3. Percentage of veterans obtaining employment upon completion of an Individual Vocational Rehabilitation Plan, 2010–2012. Source: Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, Improving the New Veterans Charter: The Report (2013), citing Veterans Affairs Canada data

As illustrated in Figure 3, the proportion of veterans obtaining employment after completing vocational rehabilitation increased from 26% in fiscal year 2010–2011 to 41% in 2011–2012, representing an improvement of 15 percentage points (Office of the Veterans Ombudsman). This increase supports the argument that rehabilitation improved access to civilian employment among program completers. However, even in 2011–2012, fewer than half obtained employment upon completion, suggesting that improved qualifications alone did not consistently translate into immediate work.

Moreover, the significance of this improvement must be considered within its historical and statistical context. The figures represent outcomes across only two fiscal years rather than a sustained trend since the Charter's introduction in 2006. Furthermore, the data do not establish that vocational rehabilitation independently caused the improvement, as changes in labour market conditions, participant characteristics, and employment opportunities may also have contributed. The measure additionally captures employment immediately upon completion of rehabilitation, without determining whether veterans maintained those positions over subsequent months or years. Nevertheless, the increase suggests

that the program was associated with progress in helping participating veterans enter the civilian workforce.

While these initial outcomes suggest improvements in employment participation, successful job placement does not necessarily translate into equivalent improvements in economic well-being. From an economic perspective, employment is generally expected to generate income, reduce dependence on government assistance, and improve household living standards. However, this relationship depends on the availability of sufficient working hours, appropriate wages, and stable employment over time. When employment earnings are examined as a measure of economic reintegration, a more complicated picture emerges.

According to Veterans Affairs Canada's *Life After Service Studies 2016*, which examined the financial outcomes of 42,645 Regular Force veterans released between 1998 and 2014, veterans who completed VAC's Rehabilitation Program recovered approximately 50% of their pre-release employment earnings in later years following program completion (Veterans Affairs Canada, "Pre- and Post-Release Income"). Despite participating in rehabilitation, these veterans continued to earn substantially less from employment than they had during military service. This finding complicates the apparent success of vocational rehabilitation because obtaining employment does not necessarily restore an individual's previous earning capacity.

The distinction between employment earnings and total income is important. The same study found that veterans who completed rehabilitation generally recovered their pre-release total income relatively quickly and eventually exceeded it, partly because total income includes pensions, government transfers, and other sources beyond employment (Veterans Affairs Canada, "Pre- and Post-Release Income"). Consequently, the reduction in employment earnings does not necessarily indicate an equivalent decline in overall household income or living standards. However, it does suggest that some veterans remained less economically reliant on civilian employment than they had been on military

earnings. Although income support can protect financial security during rehabilitation, continued dependence on non-employment income may also indicate that occupational retraining has not fully restored an individual's ability to earn independently in the civilian labour market. Together, the earnings and total-income findings suggest uneven reintegration. Financial security could recover through pensions and transfers even when civilian earnings remained lower. This distinguishes the success of the wider support system from the specific contribution of vocational rehabilitation.

These findings must also be interpreted cautiously because the income study includes veterans released before the New Veterans Charter was introduced in 2006. The comparison measures financial outcomes before and after military release rather than isolating the causal effects of the legislation. Differences in civilian wages, working hours, retirement decisions, and medical conditions may explain part of the earnings decline. Nonetheless, the findings illustrate an important distinction between obtaining employment and recovering employment-based income, demonstrating why job placement alone provides an incomplete measure of economic reintegration.

This limitation was recognized during the Charter's early implementation. In its 2013 report *Improving the New Veterans Charter*, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman identified inadequate performance measurement as a weakness of the vocational rehabilitation system. In particular, it criticized the lack of sufficient monitoring to determine whether veterans obtained employment after completing their rehabilitation plans and whether they remained employed. The concern is significant because a program evaluated primarily through immediate employment outcomes may appear successful even when its longer-term effects on occupational stability remain uncertain.

The evidence therefore suggests that the New Veterans Charter made progress toward improving veterans' employability, but the extent to which these achievements translated into sustainable economic reintegration is less clear. The improvement in employment placement, combined with continued shortfalls in employment earnings and limitations in outcome monitoring, indicates that a more

comprehensive assessment must consider the conditions affecting veterans' ability to participate consistently in the civilian workforce.

Section II: The Underlying Problem of Sustainable Employment

The discrepancy between improved job placement and the continued shortfall in employment earnings suggests that obtaining civilian employment may be only the first step toward successful economic reintegration. While the New Veterans Charter sought to improve veterans' employability through education and retraining, these measures primarily address the qualifications needed to enter the workforce rather than all the conditions necessary to remain employed. Employment statistics provide limited insight into the physical demands of civilian occupations, the consistency of working hours, or the long-term challenges veterans encounter in maintaining their positions. Consequently, the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation must also be evaluated through employment sustainability rather than job placement alone.

The limitations of vocational rehabilitation become more apparent when examining the health-related challenges veterans experience within the civilian workforce. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, 35% of employed veterans reported long-term physical or mental health conditions or health-related activity limitations at work, compared with only 13% of employed Canadian civilians. As illustrated in Figure 4, veterans were nearly three times as likely to experience these difficulties while employed. This 22-percentage-point disparity suggests that veterans face substantially greater health-related obstacles within the workplace, even after successfully obtaining civilian positions.

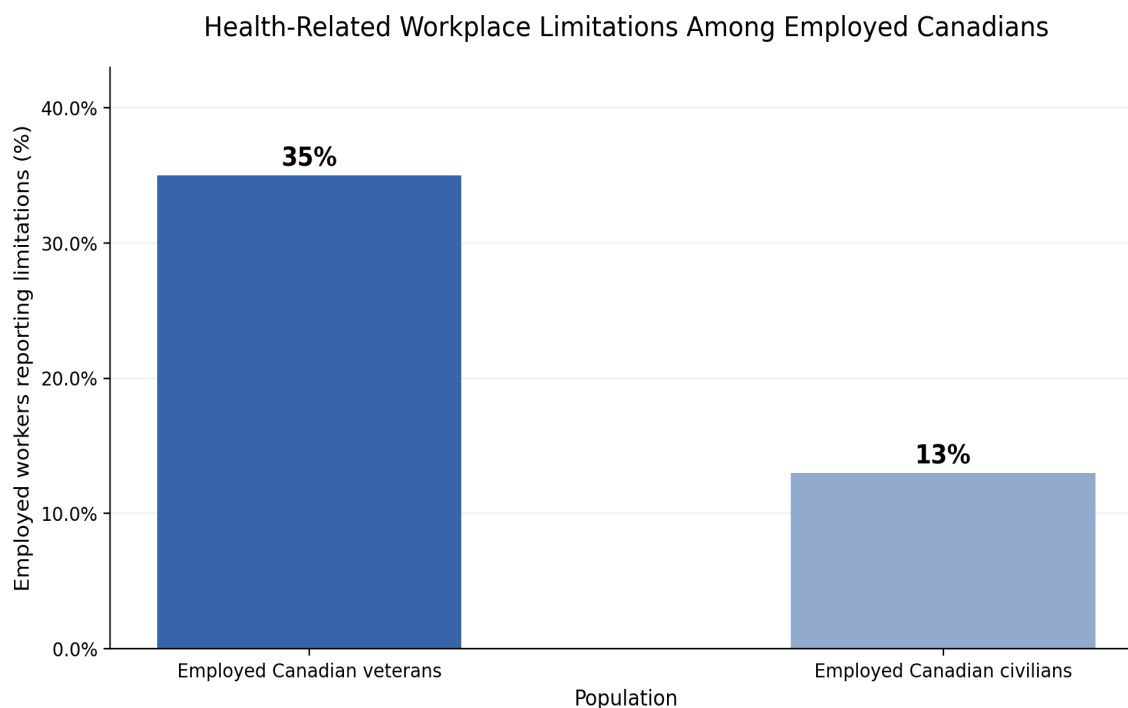


Figure 4. Prevalence of long-term health conditions or health-related activity limitations among employed Canadian veterans (35%) and employed Canadian civilians (13%). Source: Veterans Affairs Canada, “Veteran Employment,” based on the Life After Service Studies.

Although these figures do not directly measure job turnover or employment duration, they provide evidence of conditions that may interfere with sustainable participation in the labour market. Health-related limitations can affect the number of hours individuals are able to work, the range of occupational responsibilities they can perform, and their ability to maintain consistent attendance. As a result, veterans may remain formally employed while experiencing restrictions that reduce their employment earnings or limit opportunities for career advancement. The disparity therefore suggests that successful job placement may not adequately capture the practical difficulties associated with maintaining productive civilian employment.

One explanation for these challenges is the prevalence of persistent physical disabilities among Canadian veterans. According to Statistics Canada's 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, among veterans

with disabilities, 72% reported pain-related disabilities, 66% reported physical disabilities, and 51% reported sensory disabilities. Although these conditions cannot all be attributed directly to military service, their prevalence demonstrates the range of health-related difficulties experienced by veterans. Chronic pain, mobility restrictions, and hearing impairments may affect an individual's ability to perform repetitive physical tasks, commute regularly, or sustain prolonged periods of work.

Canadian human rights legislation requires employers to accommodate employees with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship (Canadian Human Rights Commission). Nevertheless, workplace accommodations may not eliminate every difficulty associated with chronic medical conditions. Even in occupations involving limited physical exertion, recurring pain or medical treatment requirements can interfere with attendance and productivity. Consequently, although vocational retraining may enable veterans to enter occupations more compatible with their abilities, it cannot necessarily remove the physical limitations influencing their long-term capacity to work.

Psychological conditions present an additional challenge. Veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, or substance use disorders may encounter difficulties with concentration, sleep, workplace relationships, and maintaining regular working schedules. These conditions may also coexist with physical disabilities, increasing the complexity of rehabilitation and restricting the range of employment opportunities compatible with an individual's health needs.

Veterans Affairs Canada's evaluation of its Rehabilitation Program found that 52% of veterans with physical health needs fully or partially achieved their rehabilitation goals, compared with 42% of those with mental health needs and 39% of those experiencing both physical and psychological conditions (Veterans Affairs Canada, "Evaluation"). The lower achievement rates among veterans with mental health needs suggest that psychological and overlapping medical conditions may present additional difficulties during rehabilitation. Although these figures concern rehabilitation objectives rather than job retention

directly, they indicate that the process of restoring functional and occupational capacity is more complex for individuals facing multiple health-related challenges.

Beyond physical and psychological conditions, the transition from military to civilian life can introduce social and occupational difficulties. Statistics Canada's 2019 Life After Service Survey found that 39% of Regular Force veterans reported a difficult transition to civilian life (Statistics Canada, "Life After Service Survey, 2019"). Military service often provides structured routines, established social networks, and clearly defined occupational responsibilities, whereas civilian employment may involve unfamiliar expectations, workplace relationships, and methods of evaluating professional competence. The loss of established military communities may further complicate this adjustment, particularly for individuals simultaneously managing injuries or psychological conditions.

These difficulties are relevant to employment sustainability because occupational qualifications represent only one component of effective participation in the labour market. A veteran may possess the technical skills necessary to obtain a position while continuing to experience challenges adapting to its social environment or maintaining the physical and psychological demands of daily work. Consequently, vocational rehabilitation that emphasizes retraining without adequately addressing broader adjustment needs may provide incomplete support for long-term economic reintegration.

The evidence must nevertheless be balanced against positive employment outcomes among veterans generally. Veterans Affairs Canada's *Veteran Employment* information brief reports that 75% of surveyed veterans were satisfied with their civilian careers, while the unemployment rate was approximately comparable to that of the Canadian population (Veterans Affairs Canada, "Veteran Employment"). These findings indicate that employment difficulties are not universal and that many veterans successfully establish satisfying civilian careers. They also illustrate why conclusions about medically released veterans should not be generalized to the entire veteran population. Individuals experiencing substantial service-related injuries or persistent medical conditions may encounter different

employment barriers from veterans who leave the military voluntarily and without comparable health limitations.

From an economic perspective, these findings reveal a limitation in applying human capital theory as the principal explanation for successful reintegration. Education and occupational retraining can improve workers' qualifications and productive capabilities, but their ability to translate those improvements into employment earnings depends on additional factors. Persistent medical conditions may restrict effective labour supply by reducing the number of hours an individual can work or limiting access to occupations that match their qualifications. Similarly, psychological and social adjustment difficulties may affect employment continuity and career progression. Improvements in human capital therefore do not necessarily produce equivalent improvements in labour market outcomes when other barriers remain unresolved.

Historically, this distinction highlights the importance of the New Veterans Charter's broader rehabilitation objectives. The 2006 reforms were intended to support civilian re-establishment through medical, psychosocial, and vocational assistance rather than occupational training alone. However, the continuing prevalence of health-related limitations suggests that the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation depends partly on how successfully these different forms of support operate together. The challenge is therefore not simply whether the Charter provides education and retraining, but whether the rehabilitation framework enables veterans to use their newly acquired skills consistently in civilian employment.

Overall, the evidence suggests that vocational rehabilitation has addressed an important component of economic reintegration by improving veterans' access to employment opportunities. However, persistent physical, psychological, and social barriers may restrict the benefits of these opportunities, particularly for medically released veterans. The Charter's achievements in job placement

must therefore be evaluated alongside the extent to which its broader rehabilitation framework supports sustained participation in the labour market and the recovery of employment-based earning capacity.

Section III: Primary Research - Veterans' Experiences of Sustainable Employment

The challenges associated with sustaining civilian employment can be further examined through firsthand interviews with Canadian Armed Forces veterans. While national statistics demonstrate the prevalence of physical and psychological limitations, individual accounts can provide insight into how these conditions affect veterans' experiences after leaving military service. To protect participants' identities, all interviewees are identified using pseudonyms, such as Veteran A, Veteran B, and Veteran C.

A firsthand interview with a medically released Canadian Armed Forces veteran from Ontario (referred to here as Veteran A) illustrates the difficulties associated with returning to work while managing persistent physical injuries. Reflecting on his experience in civilian employment, Veteran A recalled, *"Some mornings were worse than others. I never really knew how my back was going to feel when I woke up."* (Veteran A, personal communication, March 26, 2026). Although Veteran A had obtained employment following occupational retraining, recurring pain complicated his ability to maintain regular working hours. His experience illustrates how physical limitations may continue to influence employment sustainability even when veterans possess the qualifications required for civilian occupations.

Similar difficulties emerged in an account from a medically released veteran in British Columbia (Veteran B), who described challenges associated with adjusting to civilian working environments. Reflecting on his transition, he remarked, *"I remember finding it strange how everyone just went home at five and forgot about work."* (Veteran B, personal communication, January 13, 2026). This observation reflects the differences between the structured, collective environment of military service and the expectations of civilian workplaces. Such adjustments may contribute to difficulties developing

professional relationships and establishing a sense of belonging, particularly when accompanied by existing psychological conditions.

However, vocational rehabilitation may also provide meaningful benefits. An interview with a medically released veteran from Quebec (Veteran C) highlights the opportunities created through government-funded retraining. Discussing his transition into civilian employment, Veteran C recalled, *"I hadn't been in a classroom in years, so going back to school took some getting used to"* (Veteran C, personal communication, March 23, 2026). His experience illustrates the personal adjustments involved in acquiring new qualifications following military release. Despite these challenges, access to occupational education may enable veterans to pursue careers that would otherwise remain inaccessible, demonstrating the potential benefits of the Charter's emphasis on human capital development.

These contrasting experiences illustrate the importance of considering individual circumstances when evaluating the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation. While the New Veterans Charter may improve access to civilian employment through education and retraining, persistent medical conditions and difficulties adjusting to civilian life can continue to influence veterans' ability to maintain employment. At the same time, positive experiences with retraining demonstrate that the Charter can provide valuable opportunities for veterans seeking to establish new careers. Its contribution to economic reintegration therefore depends partly on whether improvements in employability are accompanied by the support necessary to sustain civilian employment over time.

Conclusion

The evidence examined throughout this investigation suggests that vocational rehabilitation under the New Veterans Charter has improved the economic reintegration of Canadian Armed Forces veterans since 2006, although its effectiveness has been more substantial in facilitating initial employment than in ensuring long-term economic independence. The increase in successful job placements following rehabilitation demonstrates that government investment in education and occupational retraining can

improve veterans' employability by addressing mismatches between military experience and civilian labour market requirements. In this respect, the Charter represented a meaningful advancement from Canada's historically compensation-oriented approach toward a framework emphasizing rehabilitation and economic participation.

However, improvements in employment participation have not consistently translated into the recovery of pre-release employment earnings. Persistent physical disabilities, psychological conditions, and difficulties adjusting to civilian life may restrict veterans' ability to maintain regular working hours and fully utilize their acquired qualifications. These findings expose the limitations of relying primarily on human capital investment to achieve economic reintegration, as improvements in occupational skills cannot independently overcome barriers affecting an individual's capacity to work. At the same time, evidence of positive employment outcomes and successful rehabilitation experiences demonstrates that the Charter's contributions should not be underestimated.

The extent of these achievements remains difficult to establish conclusively. Available employment statistics often measure immediate job placement rather than long-term employment retention, while income studies do not isolate the effects of the 2006 legislation from broader economic and individual circumstances. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that vocational rehabilitation has addressed an important component of economic reintegration without fully resolving the challenges associated with sustainable employment. The findings suggest that future government investment should extend beyond occupational retraining to address the underlying physical and psychological barriers affecting veterans' ability to sustain employment.

Ultimately, the New Veterans Charter has made a meaningful but incomplete contribution to veterans' economic reintegration. Its long-term effectiveness depends on the extent to which vocational training is supported by continued medical, psychological, and occupational assistance that enables veterans to maintain employment and recover their earning capacity. The historical shift toward

rehabilitation therefore represents an important development in Canadian veterans' policy, but its success must be measured through sustained economic outcomes.

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