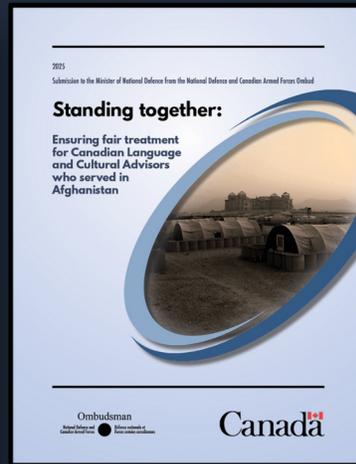
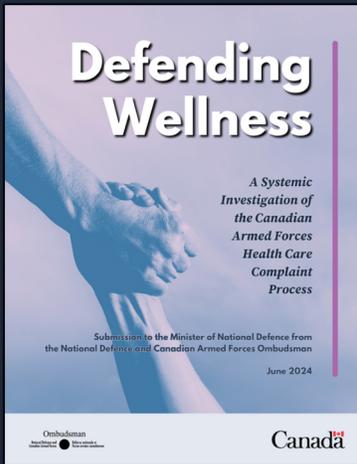


ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 2025



Report of the Office of the Ombudsman for National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces to the Minister of National Defence

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Message from the Interim Ombud

This year's report reflects work that began under the leadership of my predecessor, Gregory Lick, whose term concluded in June. I want to thank him for his commitment to fairness and transparency throughout his time as Ombudsman. With the continued dedication of our team, we've carried that momentum forward to complete one of our most impactful years yet.

We published five reports highlighting critical issues that matter to the Defence community. We closed over 2,500 individual files, the most since our office opened, helping thousands of people navigate complex and often deeply personal challenges. We also launched a systemic investigation focused on the experiences of Reserve Force members—an integral but often overlooked component of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

We published nine progress reports following up on previous systemic investigations and saw meaningful improvements on several fronts, including policy updates and enhanced communication with members of the Defence community. While we acknowledge these positive developments, we continue to track recommendations that have not yet been implemented. Our work also informed public accountability through Parliament: four House of Commons Standing Committee reports cited recommendations from nine of our reports as evidence. These included the Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN) and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA), further demonstrating the relevance and credibility of our work. In addition to written submissions, we participated in parliamentary committee meetings and contributed to the dialogue on key issues affecting the Defence community.

To make information about CAF benefits and services more accessible, we expanded the Military Benefits Browser (MBB) to include all benefits and services available to CAF members and their families. Relaunched in partnership with the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jennie Carignan, the expanded MBB supports key military priorities such as recruitment, retention, transition, and well-being. Navigating the complex web of programs and services available to members and their families can be overwhelming. Designed for all CAF members, military families, decision-makers, and prospective recruits, it allows users to easily filter benefits, access accurate information, and better understand their entitlements from recruitment through to transition to civilian life. The tool has been met with overwhelmingly positive feedback, and its impact has extended beyond our borders. We will continue refining the tool based on feedback from members and families.

We continued to engage directly with constituents across Canada and internationally—through 38 in-person, virtual, and hybrid sessions—ensuring we stay connected to the people we serve.

We strengthened relationships with ombudsman institutions for armed forces around the world. Our office participated in three international events, exchanging insights and best practices with peers from across the globe. It was a privilege to be invited as expert speakers

at two of these gatherings, where we shared Canadian perspectives and learned from others facing similar challenges. We also hosted two visiting delegations to share our perspectives on the Ombuds role in the Armed Forces and were honoured to appear as a witness before an international parliamentary committee to contribute to global dialogue on accountability and oversight. These exchanges reinforce international collaboration and build mutual capacity.

We also remained active within the Canadian ombudsman community. One of our staff members continued to serve on the board of directors for the Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen, contributing to national discussions and capacity-building. At the Forum's 2024 biennial conference, we delivered a learning session based on lived experiences and best practices on how to deal with challenging responsible authority behaviors. The event allowed for participants to share and learn from each other - strengthening our own practice while supporting shared learning across jurisdictions.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff of our office. Their professionalism, empathy, and commitment to the people we serve are at the core of everything we do. It is their hard work that makes these achievements possible.

We are equally grateful for the trust placed in us by the Defence community. That trust is what gives our work meaning—and reinforces our commitment to being a trusted voice for fairness and accountability, and to supporting the Defence community with respect, independence, and compassion.

As we reflect on our impact, it's also important to acknowledge the broader context in which we serve. This office operates on lands that are the traditional territory of Indigenous Peoples, and we work within institutions shaped by a colonial history that caused—and continues to cause—real harm. That's something we must hold space for as we continue our efforts toward greater fairness, transparency, and accountability.

In the year ahead, we will focus on deepening the impact of our work—strengthening systemic oversight, expanding awareness of recourse options, and ensuring that our recommendations lead to meaningful change for the Defence community.

Robyn Hynes
Interim Ombud

Recognizing the Defence community: The *Liz Hoffman Memorial Commendation*

The Liz Hoffman Memorial Commendation is awarded annually to Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members, civilian employees, family members, and other members of the Defence community who go above and beyond in helping their colleagues resolve difficult problems or who bring about positive and lasting change within the Department of National Defence (DND) and the CAF.

Many distinguished guests attended this year's ceremony, including Dr. Andrea Hoffman, daughter of Liz Hoffman. Attendees also included: Parliamentary Secretary Marie-France Lalonde (on behalf of the Minister of National Defence), General Jenny Carignan, Chief of the Defence Staff, and Associate Deputy Minister Natasha Kim, and other representatives from both the CAF and DND.

The 2024 Liz Hoffman Memorial Commendation recipients were: Eilise Valleie, Jenn McStravick and The Natasha's Wood Foundation.

Find out more about their achievements and those of past recipients on our website.



From left to right: Dr. Andrea Hoffman, Eilise Valleie, Jenn McStravick and The Natasha's Wood Foundation

Making a difference in the lives of our constituents

Delays in Reserve Force Compensation application

A Reserve Force member contacted our office for assistance after experiencing lengthy delays in the processing of their Reserve Force Compensation (RFC) application. This is a benefit designed to compensate reservists for loss of wages due to a service-related injury, disease, or illness.

The member was injured during basic training and could not continue military service or return to civilian employment. The member's unit had little experience with the RFC process. Therefore, the unit did not initially apply for compensation on behalf of the member. Instead, the member received Class "A" Reserve Service pay to attend medical appointments and handle administrative tasks.

The Class "A" Reserve Service payments created further complications. The Reserve Force member's Chain of Command believed the payments disqualified the member from RFC eligibility. For this reason, the Chain of Command was reluctant to forward the file to the approving authority. After reviewing the case, we recommended that the unit consult the Director of Casualty Support Management (DCSM) for guidance. DCSM confirmed that the paid activities were typical during a period of RFC and did not affect the member's eligibility for compensation. DCSM then requested a rationale for each pay decision made for the period in which the member requested RFC. Based on this information, DCSM approved the RFC application, and the member received their retroactive payments.

Assistance with medical employment limitations

A member with medical employment limitations (MEL) contacted our office for assistance. They felt that their Chain of Command was not respecting their MEL.

They had requested a posting to the transition centre to receive the support needed due to their MEL. However, their chain of command denied the request, citing the absence of a permanent medical category.

Our investigator reviewed the changes in the member's medical circumstances and asked three key parties to reassess the case:

- Director Military Careers Administration,
- Director Medical Policy, and
- Director Military Careers

Following the reassessment, the denial was reversed, and the member was posted to the transition centre. This allowed the member to function within their MEL and gain access to the necessary medical services while facilitating an eventual transition out of the CAF.

Adjudication of relocation benefits

A member contacted our office for assistance with a Household Goods and Effects (HG&E) reimbursement request. The member had submitted an expense claim for moving their HG&E from storage to their intended place of residence (IPR). After requesting assistance from their relocation coordinator to submit a request for adjudication, the coordinator declined to forward the request to the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration (DCBA), the approving authority.

To resolve the issue, we reached out to the relocation coordinator to clarify the adjudication approval process and their responsibilities under the relocation directive. As a result, the coordinator submitted the member's request to DCBA, who approved it, ensuring fair treatment of the member.

Termination of medical coverage

A member of the Reserve Force contacted our Office after their coverage for medical benefits was discontinued for no apparent reason. This interruption had also occurred in 2021, so it was a second interruption in 2024 for the member. This had a negative impact on their family who could no longer renew their prescriptions at the pharmacy. This situation caused great concern given the state of health of their sick spouse. They had to pay more than \$3,000 a month themselves. We reviewed the file to understand the situation and assist the Reserve Force member.

We found that there were deficiencies in the management of mailings of memoranda of understanding for reserve service to the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP). We intervened with the PSHCP to rectify the situation. Thanks to our intervention, the situation was resolved and medical coverage was restored.

Subsequently, the reserve unit reviewed and strengthened their procedures to prevent this from happening again.

PSHCP and an extension to a Reservist's period of employment

A member contacted our office seeking information about how extensions to Reserve Force periods of employment impact eligibility for Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP) benefits. Working in their unit's orderly room, the member expressed concerns about the process for renewing PSHCP coverage when employment is extended. Unclear procedures have led to confusion over who is responsible for notifying PSHCP of these extensions, resulting in some colleagues losing their benefits.

To address these issues and establish a standard process, the member reached out to us for guidance. We provided the official PSHCP procedures, which state that the unit must submit renewal documentation within 60 days to maintain uninterrupted coverage (failure to submit to do so results in a three-month gap in benefits for the member and their family). With this information, the member and their unit can now help others avoid such situations in the future.

How we helped: a year in review

Members of the Defence community can contact us if they have been treated unfairly, if they are looking for information, or if they are uncertain about how to deal with an issue.

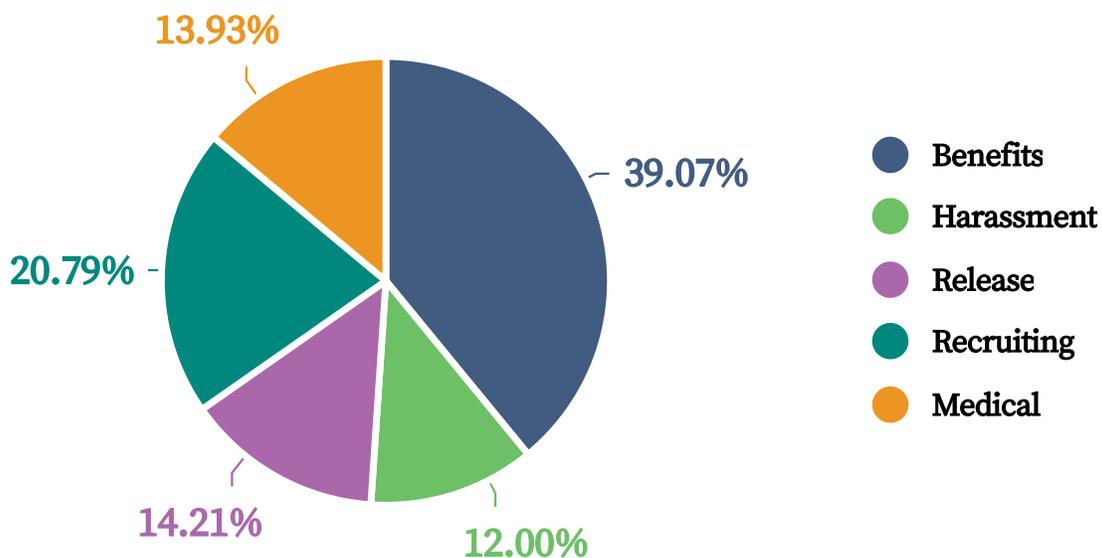
Our constituents can:

- Call us toll-free at 1-888-828-3626
- Submit a question or complaint through our secure online form
- Live chat with an agent
- Book a phone call with an agent
- Email an agent for information or assistance
- Email for general office inquiries
- Our website explains how we can help.

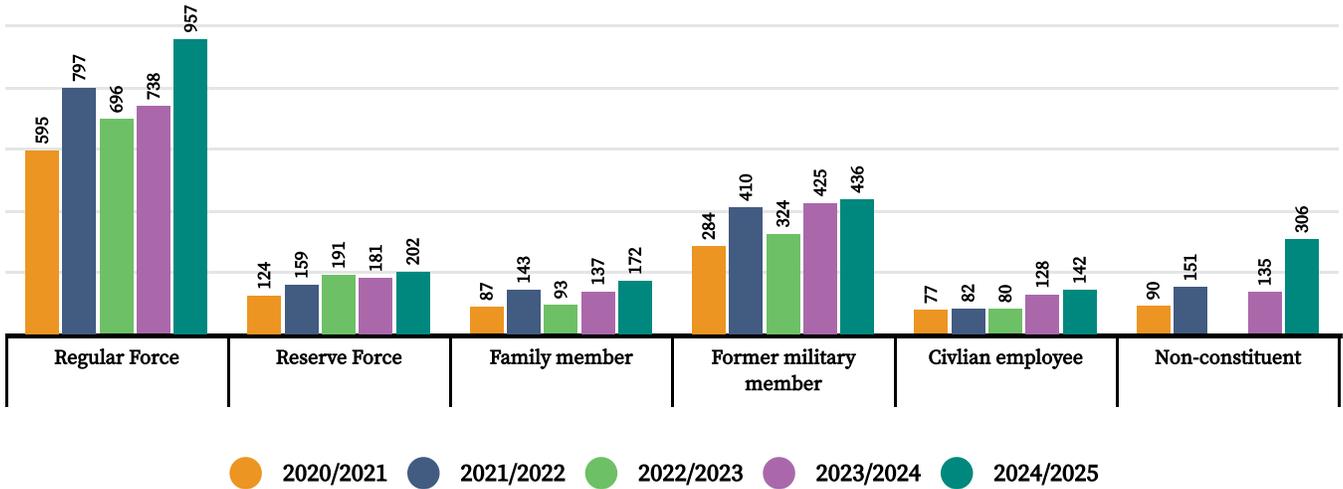
In 2024-2025, we received 2,565 requests. Of those requests, 454 (or 17%) were outside our mandate. The following graphic represents the category of the requests within our mandate.

Note: The new cases omit contacts we have received through our live chat and email.

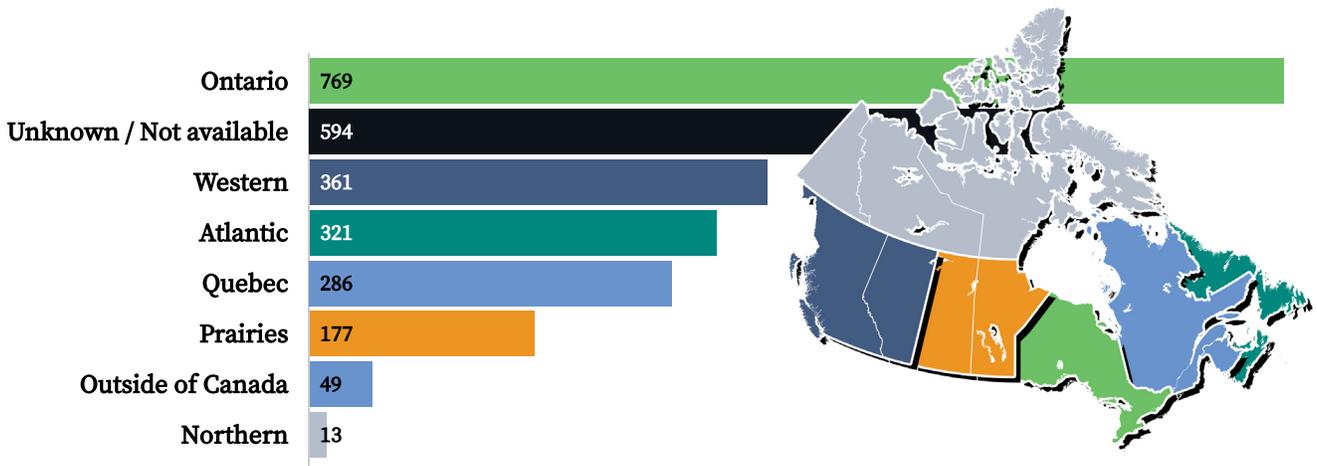
Top new case categories



New cases by constituent groups



Origin of cases



Sample cases

Sample cases are available on our website, which describe the types of cases we handle.

Case information for 2024–2025

Summary of cases handled

New Cases	2,565
Cases Carried over from FY 2023-2024	246
Cases Re-opened	131
Cases in Progress (as of April 1, 2024)	189
Total Cases Handled	2,942

Closures

Cases closed at intake

Abandoned	272
Withdrawn	118
Outside mandate	363
Information or assistance provided	1441
Referred to existing mechanisms	431
Contact provided information	3
Total	2,628

Cases closed at complaint resolution

Abandoned	2
Withdrawn	7
Information or assistance provided	19
Referred to existing mechanisms	3
Informal resolution	15
Total	46

Cases closed at investigation

Abandoned	4
Withdrawn	7
Information or assistance provided	64
Referred to existing mechanisms	4
Informal resolution	13
Investigated / issues identified / follow-up required	1
Investigated / issues identified and addressed / no follow-up required	28
Unfounded	9
Contact provided information	1
Total	131

We address both complex and noteworthy cases by conducting thorough reviews and investigations of individual complaints. Our goal is to ensure that the DND and the CAF treat our constituents fairly. We collaborate with the DND and CAF to provide practicable, evidence-based recommendations when appropriate.

In 2024–25, the General Investigations team closed 131 files. Of these, 51 files required individual recommendations to address fairness concerns, resulting in 64 recommendations to the DND and the CAF—all of which they accepted and implemented.

Below is a breakdown our recommendations as they relate to our mandate:

Recommendations under what section of the Mandate

36(a)–Referred to the competent authority for further consideration	28
36(b)–Omission should be rectified	13
36(c)–Decision/recommendation should be quashed/substituted	4
36(d)–A law/policy/practice on which a decision, recommendation, act/omission was based should be reviewed	2
36(e)–Reasons should have been given for a decision/recommendation	5
36(f)–Delay should be rectified	10
36(g)–Other steps should be taken to achieve substantial and long-lasting improvements to the welfare of employees and members	2
Totals	64

How we helped: investigating systemic issues

Systemic investigations and progress reports are available on our website.

Systemic Investigation with a focus on the health care complaint process

In June 2024, we published *Defending Wellness: A Systemic Investigation of the Canadian Armed Forces' Health Care Complaint Process*. We found that the absence of a formalized process has led to inconsistencies in how Canadian Forces Health Services (CFHS) centres addressed health care complaints. CFHS had been working on formalizing a process for several years but could not accomplish this due to workload demands. The lack of a formal process and a centralized tracking system resulted in the following outcomes:

- Members frequently resorted to the grievance process, which caused delays, and could led to inequitable outcomes, and did not respect the principle of person partnered care; and
- The CAF could not identify gaps and systemic issues, thereby hindering efforts to make improvements.

We made two recommendations in the report: the CAF implement a health care complaint policy, and the CAF develop a system for tracking health care complaints.

We were pleased to note the progress made with the launch of the New CAF Patient Complaint Submission Tool in March 2025. Our office will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this tool in the resolution patient complaints.

Systemic Investigation with a focus on the military grievance process

Also in June 2024, we published *Getting Redress Right: An investigation into the inequities CAF members face when they have limited or no grievance rights*.

We found that the Canadian Armed Forces' limited authority to resolve grievances related to military compensation and benefits as Treasury Board policies govern these areas. This renders the military grievance process ineffective for providing redress in these cases. This negatively impacts both CAF members and the institution.

We made seven recommendations to the Minister, the Department of National Defence and the CAF. These aim to ensure that CAF members and authorities are aware of the matters that they cannot fully address through the grievance process, and to explore appropriate alternatives for those issues.

Review of civilian complaint mechanisms

In May 2024, we published *Fair decision-making for fair outcomes: Complaint mechanisms for DND employees*. This report followed a comprehensive review of two internal complaint mechanisms for DND civilian employees: the harassment and violence resolution process and the individual grievance process. During our review, we identified gaps in procedural fairness and case management.

We made fifteen recommendations to the DND, urging concrete steps to strengthen procedural fairness for all parties involved in internal complaint processes and to improve case management practices.

In March 2025, we published *Fair Decision-Making for Fair Outcomes: A Review of the Whistleblowing Process for DND Employees*. This report concluded our office's review of the Department of National Defence's (DND) internal complaint mechanisms and focused on the Department's internal disclosure of wrongdoing (whistleblowing) process. During this review, we also identified gaps in procedural fairness and case management.

We made three recommendations to the DND, calling for concrete steps to strengthen procedural fairness protections for participants in the internal whistleblowing process and to improve case management practices.

Systemic investigation into the treatment and care of the former Language and Cultural Advisors (LCAs) who served Canada in Afghanistan

In January 2025, we published *Standing Together: Ensuring Fair Treatment for Canadian Language and Cultural Advisors Who Served in Afghanistan*. We examined the experiences of Language and Cultural Advisors (LCAs) who supported Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) operations in Afghanistan. Some of these LCAs later contacted our office about ongoing struggles to access care and support for injuries sustained during their service.

Our review revealed:

- The LCAs' working conditions were not as described by DND during recruitment, with many facing far greater risks than anticipated.
- Delayed policy implementation and frequent deployments created significant challenges for LCAs.
- Unlike CAF members, the health and welfare of LCAs were not monitored after their employment ended.
- The LCAs' status as term employees limited their access to employer-provided health care and benefits after deployment.
- Many LCAs have struggled for more than a decade to identify and access appropriate support for serious health and welfare challenges.
- These difficulties were largely attributed to the previous lack of DND policy for managing LCAs' post-deployment needs.

We made two recommendations to the Minister of National Defence, urging immediate action to address critical gaps in care and coverage for LCAs and to ensure they receive the fair treatment and support they deserve. As of March 31, 2025, the Minister had not yet accepted our recommendations.

Systemic review into the delays in implementing our Primary Reserve recommendations made in 2016.

In December 2024, we launched a systemic review into delays in implementing our 2016 recommendations for the Primary Reserve, outlined in our reports *Part-Time Soldiers with Full-Time Injuries* and *A Systemic Review of Compensation Options for Ill and Injured Reservists*.

We want to understand the barriers the CAF faces in implementing these recommendations, to determine which of these remain relevant, and to identify any new issues that have emerged. We plan to publish our report in fall 2025. Systemic review of military complaints mechanisms

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Progress reports

We conducted follow-ups to assess DND's and CAF's progress in implementing recommendations from nine of our previous reports. We published progress reports summarizing their implementation status in summer and fall 2024.

While most follow-ups showed some progress from the DND and the CAF, significant work remained outstanding to support ill and injured Reserve Force members. Due to this, the Reserve Review was launched.

The highlight of this year's follow-up goes to the CAF (Director General Military Careers) who has significantly improved support and transparency for CAF members and families. The approval process of the Contingency Cost Move for Personal Reasons, Compassionate Status, and Compassionate Postings is now provided with greater flexibility and transparency.

Ombudsman's recommendations cited as evidence

This year, four House of Commons Standing Committee reports incorporated our office's recommendations:

- The Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN):
 - *Providing Aid to the Civil Power: Disaster Relief and the Canadian Armed Forces' Domestic Operations* (Recommendation 12),
 - *Rebuilding Trust: Transparency and Accountability in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces* (Recommendation 14),
 - *Gaps to Fill: Housing and Other Needed Supports for Canadian Armed Forces Members and Their Families* (Recommendation 22).
- The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA):
 - *Reforming Transition from Military to Civilian Life* (Recommendation 1).

To date, recommendations from nine of our reports have been cited as evidence in standing committee proceedings.

This is important as it demonstrates support for our evidence-based reports, allowing them to be part of public record, and in certain instances, compels the Government of Canada to respond to the committees' reports in a fulsome manner.

How we helped: connecting with constituents

Educational resources

We prepare web content based on our analysis of intake cases, constituent engagements, and meetings with pertinent authorities and policy holders. This year we focused on updating and streamlining the information we provide online, as well as creating new products to support the theme and recommendations from our systemic investigations.

Our efforts included:

- Principles of Procedural Fairness
- Official Languages for the Defence Community
- Complaint Resolution for CFHA Military Housing Services
- Recourse and Complaint Mechanisms

CAF:

- Recourse for Health Services Complaints
- Recourse for Official Languages (CAF members and military families)
- Recourse for Compensation and Benefits Issues
- Providing Medical Support: The Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group (CAF TG)
- Recourse for Relocation Issues
- Staff of the Non-Public Funds, Canadian Forces (SNPF CF):
- Recourse for Official Languages (SNPF CF)

Civilian:

- Job Classification Recourse
- Filing a Complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Grievances
- Recourse for Official Languages

We also updated our educational resources related to:

- the Reserve Force,
- conduct deficiencies,
- medical releases,
- entitlements for injured Cadets,
- civilian classification,
- important documents for military life,
- medical release, and
- scholarships for military members and their families.

You can find these materials on our Educational Information page.

We are continuing to develop additional educational products to help CAF members make informed decisions when using CAF complaint mechanisms.

Military Benefits Browser

On 28 November 2024, the Ombud collaborated with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Chief of the Defence Staff to announce the expanded Military Benefits Browser (MBB). This announcement supported key military priorities such as recruitment, retention, transition, and well-being. Navigating the numerous and complex programs and services available to CAF members and their families can be daunting. The MBB, originally launched in 2018 and expanded in 2024, brings these programs and services together in one accessible, user-friendly online platform, avoiding duplication by linking directly to authoritative resources



We designed the MBB for all CAF members, military families, decision-makers, and prospective recruits. It allows users to:

- easily sort and filter benefits,
- access important information more simply, and
- better understand the programs and services to which they are entitled throughout their military careers - from recruitment to release and transition to civilian life

The MBB has attracted the attention of the international military oversight community. In December 2024, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance invited us to participate in a workshop on effective strategies for reaching and engaging constituents, raising awareness, and making military policies more accessible.

Total User engagement:

- 11,760 total user sessions
- 9,840 unique users

Engagements

Outreach

- 38 outreach activities
- Over 6,400 constituents engaged

Parliamentary Engagement

- 1 meeting with a Senator
- 5 meetings with Members of Parliament
- 3 meetings with provincial legislators

Media

- 9 media interviews
- 7 written responses to media inquiries*
- 2 op-eds published
- 5 unique mentions in print and online media
- 1 podcast interview
- 4 mentions of our office in media transcripts

*Written media responses exclude proactive media outreach (such as phone calls) which we do not track.

International Engagements

The Ombud or Ombud's staff participated in:

- International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) (30 September to 2 October 2024)

The Ombud or Ombudsman's staff presented as experts at:

- Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), Kosovo Workshop Presentations (4 to 5 December 2024)
- Engagement with delegations from Ukraine, Latvia, Germany, Kosovo, and Geneva (DCAF)

National Engagements

- Seamless Canada (22 May 2024 and 27 January 2025)
- Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO) (22 to 24 October 2024), where we delivered a training session
- Ombuds Day Library of Parliament Seminar (10 October 2024)
- Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research Forum (CIMVHR) (21 to 23 October 2024)

Website

- 5% increase in total page views: 486,084 in 2024–2025 (compared to 396,779 in 2023–2024)

Social Media Overview

- 3 social media channels
- 6 social media accounts
- 7,549 followers
- An increase of 481 followers compared to 2023–2024

Ombudsman's Advisory Committee

Throughout the year, we consulted the Ombudsman's Advisory Committee to benefit from their expertise and gather their perspectives on our priorities. We regularly briefed and engaged the Committee on our systemic investigations on complaint mechanisms, and they provided valuable advice to guide our work. The Committee also participated in the nominations process for the Liz Hoffman Memorial Commendation.

Appendix 1—Financial statement

In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, DND allocated our office a budget of \$8,364,980. Actual expenditures totaled \$8,169,873, of which \$7,236,198 was for salaries.

The difference between the approved budget and actual expenditures represents final spending, as reported in the Public Accounts of Canada.

Money that remains unspent is returned to the Department throughout the fiscal year as part of its quarterly reporting process. In 2024–2025, we returned a total of \$59,596 worth of salary related funds, \$110,366 worth of non-salary related funds, and \$25,145 worth of Vote 5 funds related to Asset Pooled Items and Capital Assets.

Mail and Courier Services	\$1,606
Supplies/Furniture	\$38,546
Training and Professional Dues	\$55,538
Acquisition and Rental of Office Equipment	\$16,141
Network Maintenance and Support	\$21,276
Telecommunications and IT Connections	\$140,719
Travel and Transportation	\$68,561
Communications and Public Outreach	\$68,176
Professional and Special Services	\$473,257
Minor Capital & Asset Pooled Item	\$49,855
Salaries	\$7,236,198
Total	\$8,169,873

Appendix 2—Human resources

Overall indeterminate, casual, and term employee count at year-end: 72

Overall employee count at year-end (including students and on leave employees): 80

Full-time employee count at year-end: 69.96

Ombudsman

National Defence and
Canadian Armed Forces



Défense nationale et
Forces armées canadiennes



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to help.**

**Nous sommes prêts
à vous aider.**

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