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Canadian Armed Forces Retention

Major Richard Bulley

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Exercise Solo Flight

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Major Richard Bulley

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Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)

The Regular Force personnel cap within the CAF is set to expand to 71 500 personnel from the current cap of 68 000 personnel while the Primary Reserves is set to increase from the current cap of 29 000 personnel to 30 000 personnel in accordance with the latest Defence Policy: Strong Secured Engaged.¹ The increase of 3500 personnel in the allowable number of Regular Force members within the CAF will provide enough personnel to be assigned to new capabilities. These new capabilities are required for a combat capable force to be effective on the modern day battlefield as is currently being observed in Ukraine. Some of the new capabilities that are being introduced into the CAF such as cyber warfare, assets within the space domain, ground based air defence (GBAD), unmanned aerial vehicles, and additional new ships for the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), all require additional personnel to operate and maintain the new capabilities.² However, the increase in the personnel cap is just one-step in increasing the number of personnel within the CAF. This ambitious plan for growth across the CAF is currently unattainable due to various other factors required to grow the force such as balancing the number of personnel being recruited, personnel retiring, and ensuring that trained and capable personnel are being retained. The difficulty posed with each of these categories was highlighted at the end of the year 2020 when the updated staffing numbers were released by the CAF through various Canadian media outlets. These numbers painted a grim picture on the on-going struggle with even filling the current number cap

¹ Canada. Department of National Defence. D2-386/2017E. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy." Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017. <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>

² Ibid.

of personnel as the Regular Force was staffed at only 66 000 personnel while 24 000 personnel were in the Primary Reserve.³

The current staffing problem within the CAF can be described as a wicked problem. A wicked problem, as defined by Rittel & Webber, contains 10 primary characteristics which can all be recognized in the current staffing issues with the CAF either in the issues currently being experienced within recruiting or within the problem of retaining trained members.⁴ A wicked problem does not have an easy solution that can be solved in a short period. The solution is often extremely complex because of the many variables present, and the secondary and third order effects that must be understood prior to the implementation of a solution as the potential solution can make the problem worse over a long-term period if anything is overlooked.⁵ The solution to a wicked problem cannot be solved by trial and error, and an incorrect solution that is implemented cannot be readily undone, so the problem must be fully understood by all parties involved prior to implementing a solution.⁶ Rittel & Weber also identified that public-sector management can complicate the process of finding a solution due to structures and processes that must be followed which are abundant in the CAF.⁷

Accepting that staffing within the CAF can be defined as a wicked problem, this paper will only focus on the portion of the problem centered on retention in the Regular Force. In 2016, the CAF conducted a retention survey amongst all members in the hopes

³ Berthiaume, Lee. The Canadian Press. "Canada's military lacking thousands of troops as COVID-19 hits recruitment, training," Global News, 15 February 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7641131/caf-military-short-troops-coronavirus/>

⁴ Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4, 160.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 718.

⁷ Ibid., 719.

of determining what the cause of the retention issue was. A number of factors were determined to be causing the retention issue mainly job dissatisfaction, lack of geographical stability, and the member's eligibility for other benefits.⁸ Although the survey did not exclusively breakdown each category, through analysis, various factors can be gathered for each category that can influence retention in the present day CAF.

The issue of retention goes back several years. In 2014-2015, the Regular Force lost 5487 members (8% overall) while in 2015-2016, the Regular Force lost 4804 members (7% overall).⁹ While it is normal to lose members of the Regular Force due to retirement, these numbers are high when compared to other sectors and when considering the factors causing people to leave the CAF. The attrition numbers are even more concerning when they are broken down further into the various trades across the CAF. The attrition rate significantly varied by trade to create the overall total as some trades in 2015-2016 had attrition rates of over 10%.¹⁰

In order to address this, the Office of the Auditor General released a report in the fall of 2016 based on the 2016 survey. The report highlighted that many of the observations from the 2016 survey were similar to the previous survey that was conducted in 2006, but the amount of members leaving was increasing every year when compared to the number of recruits entering the CAF.¹¹ The survey report had many observations that the CAF could implement to address the retention concern, which led to the CAF to create the CAF Management Action Plan to implement the report's

⁸ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

findings.¹² The CAF Management Action Plan, which was due to be implemented by the end of 2021, still has not been implemented and as a result, the CAF is still dealing with the retention of trained, skilled, and capable members. Another survey that was conducted amongst CAF members in 2019 to look at the overall health of the CAF and confirm if there were any changes to the factors affecting retention concluded with similar results to the 2016 survey.¹³

The CAF must address the issues of job satisfaction, geographical stability, and benefit eligibility amongst members of the Regular Force in order to ensure that the CAF remains capable in carrying out defence tasks within Canada and abroad. This paper will examine the issues around job satisfaction, geographical stability, and benefit eligibility and provide recommendations to address each category.

The 2016 CAF Survey on retention identified job dissatisfaction as one of the primary reasons why personnel were leaving the CAF.¹⁴ The survey conducted in 2019, also examined job satisfaction as part of the survey.¹⁵ In the latest survey, only 64.8% of respondents identified that they had a high job satisfaction while the remaining 35.2% either had a normal or low job satisfaction.¹⁶ Job dissatisfaction is a broad category that can encompass a wide range of criteria that is dependent on the individual. The job

¹² Canada. Department of National Defence. Action Plan on Recruitment and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces. Last updated 01 June 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/action-plan-on-recruitment-and-retention-in-the-canadian-armed-forces.html>

¹³ Yeung, Edward, Evanya Musolino, and Emrah Eren. "The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Descriptive Analysis." Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC), 2019, 141.

¹⁴ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

¹⁵ Canada. Statistics Canada. Percentage of Canadian Armed Forces members with high job satisfaction, by age group and member type. 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/191204/t001c-eng.htm>

¹⁶ Ibid.

dissatisfaction in the CAF can often be linked to the member not being employed in the way they envisioned when they joined the CAF. For example, many of the recruiting videos located on the CAF Recruiting website show members of the CAF employed in their trade while conducting training or deployed on operations.¹⁷ Although it is true that members of the CAF will spend portions of their career employed in their trade that they selected on enrollment, depending on the trade, and if the member is an officer or non-commissioned member, the member will also be employed in jobs outside of their trade. These jobs range from instructing at CAF schools, institutional jobs, recruiting, facilitating large-scale training exercises, or working at base support and base operation units. It is understandable, that if a member joins the CAF to do something specific and they are only employed in that role at certain times, they will have a lower job satisfaction than somebody who is employed in a job that they were recruited to do.

The COVID-19 global pandemic played a role in job satisfaction across a number of professions around the world as people were employed with responding to the pandemic relief efforts or continued to do their current job through remote work while remaining at home. The CAF is of no exception as members responded to help Canadians by deploying and helping in long-term care facilities, supporting northern and remote communities in Canada, and assisting other governmental departments with the distribution of personal protective equipment, vaccine distribution, and contact tracing efforts.¹⁸ The vast majority of CAF personnel moved to a remote work posture as a means to protect the force. Working remotely proved to be challenging and has

¹⁷ Canada. Department of National Defence. Recruiting. Last updated March 2022. <https://forces.ca/en/>

¹⁸ Canada. Department Of National Defence. Military response to COVID-19. Last updated March 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/covid-19-military-response.html>

demonstrated to cause additional stress with personnel due to the use of new software, managing daily schedules, work expectations and having family members present.¹⁹ The added stress and increase in family demands throughout the pandemic caused an increase in retention issues across the civilian workforce known as “The Great Resignation” and no doubt had an impact on the CAF.²⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a number of releases from the CAF due to members refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine. On 8 October 2021, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) issued a directive to the CAF requiring all personnel to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless an exemption was granted.²¹ This directive was in line with the Government of Canada’s requirement for all public service employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19.²² Failure to receive the COVID-19 vaccination without an approved exemption would eventually result in release from the CAF.²³ While 98.3% of members of the CAF received a COVID-19 vaccine or were granted an exemption, 1.7% (~900 personnel) did not receive the vaccine.²⁴ These personnel are currently at various stages of the release process which is further compounding the retention issue of trained personnel in the CAF.²⁵

Another aspect that contributes to job dissatisfaction is operational tempo. In the 2016 CAF Survey on retention, operational tempo was cited by 3.3% of the survey

¹⁹ Martin, Ludivine, Laetitia Hauret, and Chantal Fuhrer. "Digitally Transformed Home Office Impacts on Job Satisfaction, Job Stress and Job Productivity. COVID-19 Findings." PLoS One 17, no. 3. 2022. 1-23.

²⁰ Sheather, Julian and Dubhfeasa Slattery. "The Great resignation—how do we Support and Retain Staff Already Stretched to their Limit?" BMJ (Online) 375, (2021): 2533.

²¹ Canada. Department Of National Defence. FAQ: COVID-19 Vaccine. Last updated 17 February 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/campaigns/covid-19/resuming-work/frequently-asked-questions/vaccines-immunization.html>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Berthiaume, Lee. The Canadian Press. “Military launches formal proceedings against more than 900 unvaccinated troops,” CTV News, 14 January 2022. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/military-launches-formal-proceedings-against-more-than-900-unvaccinated-troops-1.5740580>

²⁵ Ibid.

respondents as their main reason for leaving the CAF.²⁶ Operational tempo was not an exclusive category in the 2019 survey as it was included under job satisfaction umbrella. Operational tempo continues to be a concern for members of the CAF because when jobs remain unfilled or personnel leave the CAF, there are less members available to deploy, conduct readiness training to deploy, or to support training. The personnel who remain, are then forced to deploy or support training more often. As of March 2022, the CAF currently has approximately 2000 personnel deployed around the world.²⁷ In order to ensure that subsequent rotations of personnel are ready to deploy, they must go through their own training and validation. One example of this is Exercise Maple Resolve which takes place at the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre (CMTC) in Wainwright, Alberta each year. The exercise which runs for up to three weeks is a validation exercise which ensures that personnel have the required knowledge and skills to deploy as part of a CAF operation when required.²⁸ The exercise is a large undertaking which requires support personnel from around the CAF to run in addition to the large number of personnel training as part of the exercise.²⁹ Due to the sheer number of personnel required either taking part or supporting the exercise, personnel can find themselves in Wainwright as part of Exercise Maple Resolve for several years in a row depending on where they are posted. This is just one example out of many exercises and taskings that take place every year that contributes to the operational tempo that is felt by personnel across the CAF.

²⁶ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

²⁷ Canada. Department Of National Defence. Current Operations and Joint Military Exercises list. Last updated 13 January 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/list.html>

²⁸ Wasserbly, Daniel. "Canada Begins 'Maple Resolve', 'Maple Flag' Exercises." *Jane's Defence Weekly* 53, no. 30 (2016).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

The CAF is currently undergoing a drastic culture change in order to become more diverse and inclusive. The culture change is a result of numerous allegations of sexual misconduct and hateful conduct across the ranks. The Deschamps report in 2015 brought this conduct problem to light with numerous detailed accounts of toxic leadership.³⁰ This toxic leadership caused a mistrust in the Chain of Command across members of the CAF. It has also degraded public opinion of the CAF, weakened the overall effectiveness of the organization, and produced job dissatisfaction with serving members. In response to the Deschamps report, and many harmful conduct allegations of senior CAF Officers, the CAF implemented a new Level One organization. This new organization, the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC), will address the need for a systemic look at CAF culture and will develop and implement a plan to make the CAF more inclusive and diverse.³¹ CPCC will provide a much-needed change in the CAF and will attempt to improve job satisfaction for members. Data from the 2018 Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the CAF highlighted how much of an issue sexual misconduct and hateful conduct was across the CAF. According to the survey, in the twelve months prior to the survey 1.6% of Regular Force members (approximately 900 personnel) were victims of sexual assault in the military workplace or involving military members which was almost the same result from a similar survey conducted in 2016.³² Another alarming statistic from the survey was 70% of Regular Force members witnessed or experienced sexualized or discriminatory behaviour in the military workplace or involving military

³⁰ Deschamps, Marie. *External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces*. Ottawa: National Defence and the Canadian Forces, 2015. <https://deslibris.ca/ID/246420>

³¹ Canada. Department of National Defence. Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture. Last updated 11 March 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/organizational-structure/chief-professional-conduct-culture.html>

³² Canada. Statistics Canada. Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force, 2018. Last updated 22 May 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-603-x/85-603-x2019002-eng.htm>

members in the 12 months prior to the survey.³³ Although the latest retention survey results do not explicitly have sexual misconduct or hateful conduct as a category for release, these factors have no doubt caused personnel across the CAF to release.³⁴ Based on this, the data accounting for this reason for release could potentially be included in the job satisfaction category of past surveys.

Two high-profile examples of releases of senior officers in the CAF that fall into the category of releasing as a result of sexual misconduct or hateful conduct are LCol (Ret'd) Eleanor Taylor and LCol (Ret'd) Mark Popov. LCol (Ret'd) Eleanor Taylor, while serving as the deputy commander of 36 Canadian Brigade Group, put in her release saying "I am sickened by ongoing investigations of sexual misconduct among our key leaders."³⁵ LCol (Ret'd) Mark Popov, while serving as the Director of Cadets at the Royal Military College (RMC), attempted to intervene when he became aware of inappropriate sexual behaviour by officer cadets directed towards 17-year-old sea cadets who were visiting RMC.³⁶ After trying to discipline the perpetrators and address other hateful conduct and sexual misconduct issues at the college, LCol (Ret'd) Popov was eventually removed from his command and released from the CAF after suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the incident and the ensuing lack of support from college and CAF leadership.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

³⁵ Brewster, Murray and Kristen Everson. "Senior female officer quits Canadian Forces, says she's 'sickened' by reports of sexual misconduct," CBC News, 16 March 2021.

³⁶ Pugliese, David. "Soldier dumped for trying to crack down on sex misconduct was unfairly treated, Forces now admits." Ottawa Citizen. 29 November 2021.

³⁷ Ibid.

There are several ways to address the factors described above to increase job satisfaction of members in the CAF. The most important way to ensure that the CAF has the best chance at retaining personnel is to ensure personnel have proper career management throughout their career. Proper career management of personnel can align what an individual desires with CAF requirements thus ensuring both parties are satisfied with the outcome. The CAF adage that “you are your own best Career Manager” holds true, and demonstrates the importance of individuals voicing what they want to accomplish with their career to their supervisors whether that is to fill certain positions, attend career courses, attend other CAF courses, or to attend a certain training event. The individual’s requests can then be implemented with CAF priorities through their chain of command and their career manager. Although it is not always possible to align both an individual’s wants and CAF priorities, it does give the CAF the best chance at retaining individuals if they believe they are being listened to and supported by their chains of command whenever possible.

The new Department of National Defence (DND) initiative, the Defence Team Total Health and Wellness Strategy, that is being implemented in 2022 will have a positive impact on job satisfaction of CAF members.³⁸ The new strategy will provide all members of DND with a one-stop location through a website where members can access all of the health and wellness resources available through DND that help provide a healthy and supportive work environment.³⁹ This strategy will help CAF members navigate the large number of resources available for health and wellness, which plays an

³⁸ Canada. Department Of National Defence. The 5 Ws of the New Defence Team Total Health and Wellness Strategy. The Maple Leaf. 4 March 2022.

³⁹ Ibid.

important role in overall job satisfaction when personnel feel they are being supported. The strategy will also reduce wait times for mental health services, improve family access to tele-medicine services, and increase access to counselling services which all improve quality of life and overall job satisfaction.⁴⁰ In order to monitor progress of the Total Health and Wellness Strategy, the effectiveness of CPCC, and to confirm if chains of command are supporting their members, biennially wellness surveys must be conducted. The results of previous surveys were not published specific to an individual, but they were broken down by demographic which is enough data to draw upon to identify problems affecting a specific unit, or demographic of the CAF or across several demographics.⁴¹ This will provide insight into what could potentially be causing angst among members of the CAF at large. Updated policies or new policies can then be implemented to address the problem prior to an individual seeking a release.

The second major reason for personnel in the CAF to seek a release is geographical stability. According to the 2016 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada on CAF Recruitment and Retention, 9.9% of personnel cited that they left the CAF directly because of lack of geographical stability.⁴² When examined, other factors within the report can also be linked to geographical stability and personnel releasing from the CAF. Impact on spouse/partner and impact on children in which 13.6% and 10.5% of respondents listed as reasons for departing the CAF can also be linked to geographical stability.⁴³ There are many reasons why geographical stability is important for members

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Canada. Statistics Canada. Percentage of Canadian Armed Forces members with high job satisfaction, by age group and member type. 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/191204/t001c-eng.htm>

⁴² Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

⁴³ Ibid.

of the CAF especially during the present COVID-19 pandemic. The first major factor that is impacting military families is the current housing market across Canada. According to the latest quarterly report from the Canadian Real Estate Association, although home sales in the first quarter of 2022 are below the 2021 levels, the price of all types of housing continues to rise.⁴⁴ The average price for a home in Canada in February 2022 was \$816 000, which is expected to increase again in 2023 prior to the price leveling out in future years.⁴⁵ The substantial rise in housing prices is attributed to lower interest rates because of the COVID 19 pandemic, and higher demand for homes while there is a less supply of homes on the market.⁴⁶ In addition to the higher average housing price, the majority of home sales in cities and communities around DND establishments are sold above asking prices due to bidding because of the higher demand.⁴⁷

This housing cost increase adversely affects military families who are relocating to different geographical locations when they choose to buy a home. Due to a lack of other options available such as military housing or rental accommodations, military members are often forced to either purchase an expensive home, purchase a cheaper home that requires substantial renovations or repairs, or for the military member to proceed to the posting unaccompanied on Imposed Restriction (IR). This is further complicated when a lower ranking member is posted to a location with a high cost of

⁴⁴ Canadian Real Estate Association. Housing Market Stats: Quarterly Forecasts – 2022. 15 March 2022. <https://www.crea.ca/housing-market-stats/quarterly-forecasts/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Grant, Corben. Real estate bidding war rules Canada. Canadian Real Estate Magazine. 18 November 2020.

living as they cannot gain approval for a mortgage large enough to secure adequate housing based off of their salary and the mortgage stress test.⁴⁸

In addition to the cost of housing, military families are often faced with difficulties regarding others members of their family during a relocation which likely accounts for a portion of the percentage of personnel that cited impact on spouse/partner and impact on children as a reason for their release. Several factors must be considered during a relocation of a military family while understanding that each military family is unique and has their own requirements. Following a relocation, children of military members are required to change schools which can be stressful for all involved. The education system is managed by each province and territory which results in differences in the curriculum between all of the provinces.⁴⁹ This leads to students often being placed at a disadvantage as they could be lacking crucial knowledge that is covered at different points in another curriculum when they move between provinces.⁵⁰ There is also the social aspect where children lose acquaintances at their old location and must make new connections in their new location. For the partner/spouse of the CAF member, unless they are also employed by the CAF, they need to find employment in the new location if their job is not portable. Depending on the location of the posting and the profession of the spouse/partner, this can be challenging, as there can be limited job opportunities in some of the smaller locations where some of the CAF bases are located. This resonates with the challenges of securing a home in the new location because during the mortgage stress test when trying to secure a mortgage, only family members with confirmed employment in

⁴⁸ Canadian Real Estate Network. Canadian Mortgage Stress Test 2022. Last updated 1 February 2022. <https://canadianrealestatenetwork.com/canadian-mortgage-stress-test-2022/>

⁴⁹ Robson, Karen Dr. Sociology of Education in Canada. Canada. 2019. 93-104.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the new location count towards the total income of the family when the calculation is completed.⁵¹ This leads to the family being eligible for a lower mortgage amount based off a single confirmed income.⁵² Other challenges that must be considered in a new location is the lack of outside family support if the new location is away from extended family. This can impact the member's deployability as they do not have an additional support structure in place in case there is a family concern while they are deployed on operations or a training event. Other family supports, such as finding a family doctor, can be challenging depending on the new location. Nova Scotia, for example, which is home to the Royal Canadian Navy's East Coast Fleet, has more than 88 000 people on the primary care waitlist.⁵³ This situation can be even more complex if a family member requires appointments with a specialist due to other health conditions, as there is often an even longer waitlist for specialists.⁵⁴

These examples of only some of the factors involved in a relocation result in additional stress on military members and their families when personnel are posted to a new geographical location. There are options to mitigate these factors in the interest of retaining personnel in the CAF. As with job satisfaction, career management plays a large role in the aspect of relocation as supervisors and career managers need to understand the intricacies of an individual's needs and have a long-term plan for the individual to ensure that the move is in the best interest of the CAF and to the member. To alleviate some of the stressors involved with moving, more needs to be done to ensure the CAF is able to retain

⁵¹ Canadian Real Estate Network. Canadian Mortgage Stress Test 2022. Last updated 1 February 2022. <https://canadianrealestatenetwork.com/canadian-mortgage-stress-test-2022/>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Armstrong, Lyndsay. The Canadian Press. "Nova Scotia doctor wait list hits new record high with more than 88,300 people," Global News, 8 April 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8746467/nova-scotia-doctor-wait-list-hits-new-record/>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

individuals when a move is required. Programs such as Seamless Canada need to continue to progress and be implemented across all of Canada. The program with the goal to improve services to CAF members and their families when they move to a different province is an important way to improve the relocation process. The program, when implemented, will provide ways “to improve coordination of services for spousal employment, health care insurance applications, virtual health care, childcare, and youth education.”⁵⁵ Another way to improve the relocation process for members is to adjust the Post Living Differential (PLD) rates for the various postings around Canada. The purpose of PLD is “to reduce the negative financial impact on CAF members and their families when they are posted to a region with a cost of living above the national average.”⁵⁶ The rates for PLD along with the locations that receive PLD have been frozen since April 2010.⁵⁷ This on-going freeze is allowing DND and the Treasury Board to review how the PLD is calculated and determine how PLD will be applied in the future. As a result of this on-going review from 2010, places with a low cost of living are continuing to receive PLD even though places that now have a higher cost of living do not receive this benefit.⁵⁸

The final category that will be examined accounts for a large percentage of retention issues in the CAF. The category of eligibility for other benefits accounts for 12.7% of personnel that released according to the last retention survey and this

⁵⁵ Canada. Department Of National Defence. National Defence hosts the fourth Seamless Canada roundtable with provinces and territories. 10 December 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/news/2020/12/national-defence-hosts-the-fourth-seamless-canada-roundtable-with-provinces-and-territories.html>

⁵⁶ Canada. Department of National Defence. Post Living Differential. Last updated 7 April 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/education-information/caf-members/career/postings/post-living-differential.html>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

percentage has been consistent in previous surveys.⁵⁹ When looking at benefits, two benefits stand out that undeniably impact retention. The current CAF Regular Force Pension Plan is part of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, which all members of the Regular Force contribute to and can receive.⁶⁰ The plan allows for members of the Regular Force to retire with an unreduced pension once the member of the CAF has completed 25 years (9131 days) of CAF service.⁶¹ This plan, unlike other departments of the Public Service of Canada, does not require the member to reach a specific age in order to be eligible for the unreduced pension of 50% based on their rate of pay in their final five years.⁶² Since the pension is setup in this manner, members who join the Regular Force at the age of 18 are eligible for their pension once they reach the age of 43 years old. Often times, members at this age are in middle management positions within the CAF which the CAF is struggling to retain as was highlighted by the current Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Eyre.⁶³ A way to address the issue of retirement of members in the 40-55 age range bracket would be to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act. Additional criteria of reaching an age of 55 years old could be added to the requirement of 25 years of service in order to be eligible for an unreduced pension. This would help the CAF retain personnel in the middle management positions who are still capable of serving. In addition, this would benefit the pension plan, as it would continue to remain viable because it would not be required to pay members out for as

⁵⁹ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence. Fall 2016. 31, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

⁶⁰ Canada. Public Services and Procurement Canada. Canadian Armed Forces Pensions. Last updated 6 January 2021. <https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/fac-caf/ptntl-prspctv/mp-pm-eng.html>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Brewster, Murray. “Eyre blames sexual misconduct crisis, pandemic for shrinking military,” CBC News, 26 October 2021.

long of a period to reach the average Canadian life expectancy age. Conversely, as with any wicked problem, this could have an impact in other areas of the CAF. Recruiting could be negatively affected by a pension plan amendment, as the incentive of an earlier retirement from the CAF would no longer be available.

Another benefit that is likely having an impact on retention in the CAF is the Education and Training Benefit through Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). The Education and Training Benefit provides honourably released CAF members with financial support when pursuing education or training after their military service.⁶⁴ The benefit is very popular within the CAF as it is widely briefed and known by members. Eligibility for the benefit depends on how long the member served as members with at least 12 years of authorized days of CAF Service (4382 days) receive up to \$86,671.95 (2022 rate) and members with at least 6 years of authorized days of CAF service (2191 days) receive up to \$43,335.98 (2022 rate).⁶⁵ The rates for the benefit increase every year to account for inflation and can be used for a wide variety of training including short courses, trades training, and post-secondary education with the goal of transitioning the veteran into another career following the CAF.⁶⁶ The large sum of money available for members with only 6 years of CAF service can be a key incentive for members to release and not sign an additional contract with the CAF. This is detrimental for the CAF as a member with this period of service has likely just become qualified in their trade. Once a member reaches 12 years of service and decides to leave the CAF due to being eligible for the higher rate of this benefit, the loss is compounded. A CAF member at 12 years of service

⁶⁴ Canada. Veterans Affairs Canada. Education and Training Benefit. Last updated 5 June 2019. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/education-and-jobs/back-to-school/education-training-benefit>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

is likely starting to enter the middle management positions, which was already identified as having a shortfall of personnel within the CAF.⁶⁷ The incentive of this benefit of re-training and starting another career is very enticing for any members that could be unsure if they want to continue with the CAF. Although this benefit is excellent for Veterans who release from the CAF honourably, it could be doing more harm to retention than intended. This benefit along with the eligibility for a pension for a member who served 25 years could entice personnel to leave the CAF and look at other opportunities for training and employment.

In conclusion, the ambitious plan in the current Defence Policy: Strong Secured Engaged to increase the number of Regular Force personnel in the CAF to 71 500 personnel from the current cap of 68 000 personnel is a wicked problem.⁶⁸ There are several factors that influence increasing the number of personnel in the CAF not limited to retention and recruitment of personnel. This paper examined three categories that affected retention that were identified by Regular Force members in various surveys. The issues of job satisfaction, geographical stability, and benefit eligibility amongst members appear during each survey. These issues in the Regular Force must be addressed in order to ensure that the CAF remains capable to carry out defence tasks within Canada and abroad. Addressing these three issues will allow the CAF to grow to the desired number of personnel by limiting the number of current CAF members from releasing. This loss of

⁶⁷ Brewster, Murray. "Eyre blames sexual misconduct crisis, pandemic for shrinking military," CBC News, 26 October 2021.

⁶⁸ Canada. Department of National Defence. D2-386/2017E. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy." Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017. <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>

personnel, often times in middle management positions, is having a detrimental effect on the CAF as was highlighted by the CDS.⁶⁹

Proper career management and taking care of currently serving members is the best way to address job satisfaction and geographical stability. Career managers and supervisors need to ensure they are aligning the CAF's requirements as well as the individual member's requirements as much as possible to ensure the best possible outcome of retaining personnel. The current economy and housing market has resulted in moving between bases to become even more challenging for members and families and must be avoided unless it is in the best interest of the CAF. When moving is deemed necessary, programs and support to families need to continue to be developed and implemented. Finally, the current pension system needs to be examined as well as eligibility for education and training benefits as these two benefits, although lucrative for members, could be causing more retention issues than intended.

⁶⁹ Brewster, Murray. "Eyre blames sexual misconduct crisis, pandemic for shrinking military," CBC News, 26 October 2021.

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