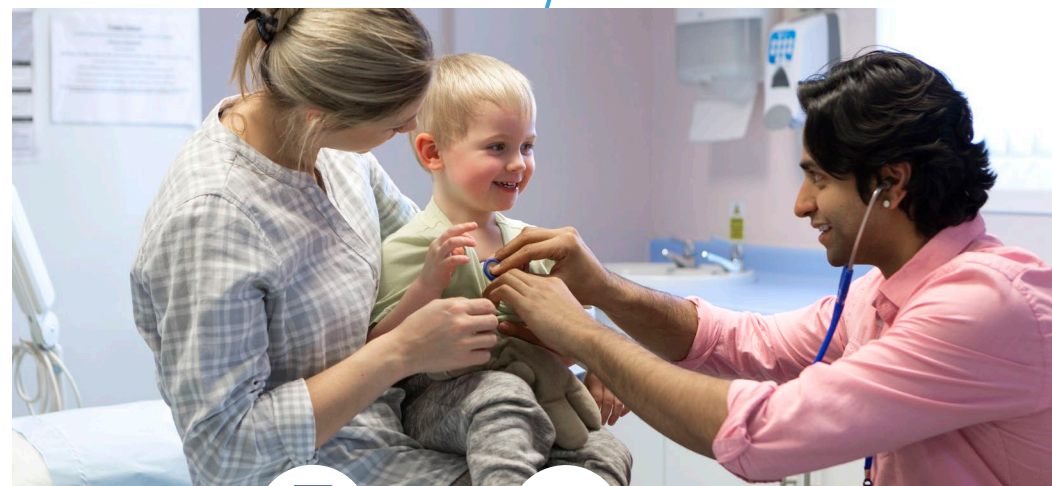


Better access to health care and mental health supports for Canada's military families

Canada's military families face extra hurdles in getting health care. Members of the Canadian Forces have health care provided by military physicians, but their family members must access care through the civilian system. Frequent relocations mean that each time a family is transferred to a new city or province, the spouses and children of service members must find new family doctors and specialists, including mental health care providers, and often encounter long wait lists. Continuous access to high-quality medical care is often mentioned as one of the top concerns for military families when assigned to a new posting. A 2013 report from Canada's Military Ombudsman highlighted gaps in research and the need for objective data to support the creation of evidence-based policy to improve the well-being of Canadian military families.



Areas of impact:



Better
Policy



Healthier
People

ICES Research

Ontario has led the way among Canada's provinces and territories in considering and addressing better health transitions for military families. About 10 years ago, Ontario began adding administrative codes that tag the health records of spouses and children of active Canadian Forces members, as part of the process to waive the 90-day waiting period for public health insurance eligibility. Other provinces and territories have followed suit. The existence of these data tags has made it possible for ICES researchers to securely and anonymously track military families within ICES' extensive data holdings

and better understand how they access the civilian health system. The work is the first of this kind in the world, providing real-world evidence about how Canadian military families use the health care system, how long they wait for health services, the prevalence of physical and mental health problems, and how their health needs may differ from those of civilians. With 40 percent of Canada's military families living in Ontario at some point, this work is fundamental to Canada's response to the problem of poor access to health care for military families.

How this work is having **impact**



[This work] helps fill a knowledge gap resulting from the fact that there had previously been no population-based Canadian data describing patterns of mental health services use in older dependents and spouses of active service personnel in the Canadian Armed Forces.

2018 announcement of the Colonel Russell Mann Military Family Health Research Award to Dr. Alyson Mahar by the Vanier Institute of the Family.

Evidence for Funding and New Programs

- In 2018, ICES researchers published the first large-scale quantitative **Canadian study of how military families access health care** following a new military posting. This work **highlighted challenges** that were previously unrecognized by many Canadians, including those who operate the health system.
- ICES **research on mental health services use** by children and youth in military families **was used by the Military Family Resource Centre** in Trenton in 2018 to secure additional funding for youth mental health needs.
- In 2018, Canada's Department of National Defence (DND) launched **Seamless Canada**, a program to improve military family relocation transitions. Researcher Alyson Mahar was invited to present ICES' findings at a planning meeting with representatives from every province and territory.
- In 2018, ICES was contracted to contribute to **Canada's Comprehensive Military Family Plan** as part of the DND's Secure and Engaged Canadian Defence Policy.

Informing National Recommendations on Care for Military Families

- The College of Family Physicians of Canada collaborated with Military Family Services in 2017 to publish a **Best Advice guide** for family doctors about health care issues specific to military families, and is developing extended learning programs for other specialties. The guide and curriculum use ICES research.
- In 2018, the Vanier Institute of the Family presented Alyson Mahar and her research team **with an award** for ICES research into how military spouses and older dependents use mental health services.