

JULY 3, 2024 ([HTTPS://WWW.ESPITDECORPS.CA/IN-THE-NEWS/VETERANS-CANCER-ADVOCATING-FOR-CHANGE](https://www.espritdecorps.ca/in-the-news/veterans-cancer-advocating-for-change))

**VETERANS WITH CANCER:  
ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE  
([HTTPS://WWW.ESPITDECORPS.CA  
THE-NEWS/VETERANS-  
CANCER-ADVOCATING-FOR-  
CHANGE](https://www.espritdecorps.ca/in-the-news/veterans-cancer-advocating-for-change))**



MINISTER OF VETERAN AFFAIRS CANADA  
GINETTE PETTIPAS - TAYLOR

VAC Minister Ginette Pettipas-Taylor

By Adrian Olivier

Veterans with Cancer is a newly formed group that is working to address challenges faced by veterans with cancers they say are linked to military-related chemical exposures. Founded by veterans Randall 'Randy' Hladun, James 'Jim' Hutton, and Donald 'Don' MacPhail, the organization aims to push for policy changes within Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to ensure better recognition and support for affected veterans. All three have prostate cancer which they blame exposure to Carbon Tetrachloride (CTC) during their military service for causing decades later.

CTC is a toxic chemical that was used to clean sound-powered headsets and electrical connections by several trades; Sonar Techs (281), Fire Control (071) and Electricians (332). When cleaning electrical connections, it was often splashed on with a paintbrush in compartments with limited ventilation. CTC was used by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as a cleaning agent until the early 1980s, making the youngest potential claimants over 65 years old. Veterans with Cancer said some of the oldest potential claimants are in their late 80s – and many have already died from cancer - and this means it's important for VAC to speed up the evaluation process of claims involving delayed injury due to chemical exposure.

Prostate cancer already affects 1 in 7 men in their lifetime, but Randy Hladun, a former Warrant Officer (WO) diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2016, began noticing a high incidence of cancer among his military peers. "Throughout the years, I started to learn about other people in my military trade as well with prostate cancer," Hladun said. This observation led him to investigate potential chemical exposures during their service and he began posting on Facebook groups to find others who had been affected. Though they were exposed to chemicals like CTC decades ago, it can take decades for the cancers to appear. "Cancer takes that

long to show up. It's proven to cause cancer, but we can't get anybody to try to look at statistics to say, yeah," Hladun said. The American National Library of Medicine's 15th Report on Carcinogens states that: "Carbon tetrachloride is, reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen."

Donald MacPhail, a former telecommunications technician noticed the same thing. "My course had seven males on it, so it would be reasonable to expect that one of us would in our lifetime have prostate cancer. Seventy-five percent of the males on my course have prostate cancer," MacPhail said.

Jim Hutton became involved after reading some of the Facebook posts that Hladun had made and is responsible for creating the group's website. Hutton waited for over two years after making his claim to VAC only to hear back that it had been rejected. He knows that getting VAC to recognize delayed cancers from chemical exposure is not an easy task: "Well, if you look at any government organization, they are very resistant to change, so they develop their process, and they're very comfortable with that process. And someone like us comes around and says, Oh, no. You're presenting a systemic barrier to us. You need to change your process. They don't want to hear that," Hutton said.

The organization has three goals they say will improve the process for veterans to get compensation for cancers from military exposure. The first is that groups of veterans with the same cancer and with exposure to the same carcinogen be considered a group instead of being considered individually.

The second goal is acknowledgement when one veteran's doctor states that a particular cancer was the result of their exposure to a specific chemical during service, then that doctor's statement

should apply to all veterans who had similar exposure to the same chemical during service and developed the same cancer.

The final goal is that Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) follow precedent when making their decisions. That means that when there is an award for compensation for a particular cancer resulting from exposure to a specific chemical while in service, that decision should establish legal precedent for all cases that follow.

Veterans with Cancer has initiated discussions with key figures in VAC, including Chris McNeil, chair of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. “[McNeil] understands, and I think he’s really moved the appeal board forward when it comes to issues like that and he has promised to get us a meeting with the ADM for Veterans Affairs because that’s really where the roadblock is and that’s where we need to help them see that there’s another way of doing business,” Hutton said.

The group is advocating for the adoption of policies similar to the U.S. PACT Act, which presumes certain cancers are service-related if the veteran was exposed to specific chemicals. The PACT Act expands VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances such as Carbon Tetrachloride. This would simplify the claims process and reduce the burden of proof on veterans. Additionally, Veterans with Cancer is pushing for VAC to adopt judicial precedents, where decisions on past cases can inform and expedite similar future claims. This approach would reduce redundancy and improve the efficiency of handling claims.

In response to Esprit de Corps’ questions the VAC responded in an emailed statement: “When court decisions are made relating to the Department’s legislation or policies, they are reviewed to determine

if adjustments are required. Existing case law as well as legal opinions provided by the Department of Justice have established that the Department of Veterans Affairs has the authority in the Pension Act and the Veterans Well-being Act to assess and categorize scientific evidence to determine whether causality exists between a service factor such as a hazardous or chemical exposure and a disability for the purposes of disability benefit entitlement. When the evidence establishes that for Canadian Armed Forces Members and Veterans, disability benefits are provided.”

The statement continued: “The Department regularly reviews the Table of Disability and its companion entitlement eligibility guidelines. If in the course of reviews, whether regular or as the result of new scientific or medical evidence that arise from an application review, this information will be communicated to the Veteran community in the following ways: a publication in the newsletter Salute; social media messages on Veteran Affairs various channels; posting on the front page of My VAC Account; and any other media used to communicate with the Veteran Community.”

Despite the emotional and physical toll of their illnesses, Hladun, Hutton, and MacPhail remain committed to their cause. Hladun, who is terminally ill, continues to advocate passionately, although he has had to step back from some responsibilities due to his advancing condition. Hutton and MacPhail have taken up the mantle, actively seeking meetings with key figures in VAC and other relevant authorities to push for policy changes.

For more information, visit the Veterans with Cancer website at <https://veteranswithcancer.com>.