

Seamless Canada | Le Canada sans faille

**STEERING COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
June 2022 – May 2023**



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Seamless Canada Steering Committee Annual Report - English
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Message from the Minister of National Defence, the Hon. Bill Blair, MP

Federal Co-Chair



I am delighted to present Seamless Canada's first annual report.

Through Seamless Canada, the Department of National Defence (DND)/Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) work primarily with provincial/territorial governments to better coordinate policies and procedures. The goal is to help military families receive fair and equitable access to public programs and services as they move between provinces and territories.

The 2017 Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, committed the Canadian Armed Forces to working with federal, provincial and private sector partners to improve the coordination of services across provinces and territories to ease the burden of moving. In 2018, Seamless Canada was launched to help meet that commitment, and has been addressing and alleviating the unique challenges that military families face during frequent relocations across Canada, particularly in the realms of healthcare, spousal employment, and child and youth education (including childcare).

This report reflects the collective work that has been conducted and improvements that have been achieved, as well as our ongoing commitment to support military families through future challenges. The significant stressors and challenges that confront military families are complex, spanning multiple jurisdictions. The Seamless Canada initiative continues to engage in these shared responsibilities to support and enhance the well-being of military families.

Whether it is responding to natural disasters or exceptional circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, providing expert search and rescue, defending Canada's sovereignty, or contributing to greater peace and security in the world, the CAF always answers the call. Because of the unwavering commitment to duty and the sacrifices that our military personnel make every day, Canada remains among the safest and most secure countries in the world. It is imperative that we ensure our members and their families—the core of the CAF—are well-supported. I am confident that the Seamless Canada initiative will continue to support CAF members and their families by reducing relocation barriers, creating a seamless experience.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Blair".

The Honourable
Bill Blair
Minister of National Defence

Message from Minister Wilson

Minister of Service New Brunswick and Minister responsible for Military Affairs
Provincial/Territorial Co-Chair



It is a great privilege to be a part of the Seamless Canada initiative and I am very honoured to be appointed as the first provincial/territorial co-chair of the Seamless Canada Steering Committee (SCSC). I look forward to future engagement opportunities within this intergovernmental body.

As a lifelong resident of Oromocto, home of the second largest military base in the country, and a member of a military family, I certainly appreciate the dedication of CAF members and the important role the CAF performs in Canada, and I empathize with the significant challenges members and their families face when relocating across the country. Seamless Canada's collective efforts are not only important but crucial in contributing to the welfare of military families, retention of CAF members, and military operational effectiveness.



The Honourable
Mary Wilson
Minister of Service New Brunswick; Minister responsible for Military Affairs

Background

Canada's Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, offers direction on Canada's defence priorities over a 20-year horizon. It prioritizes the well-being of military personnel and their families, while emphasizing the need to ensure they are well supported. Military families are the strength behind the uniform and thus an integral part of operational effectiveness.

Few occupations expose people to elevated levels of risk throughout their careers in the way that the CAF does. This includes separation from loved ones and recurring geographic relocation. On average, military families move three times more frequently than their civilian counterparts. Approximately 9,400 CAF members are required to move to a new province or territory annually.

It is recognized that many of the issues associated with frequent relocation are outside the jurisdiction of DND/CAF. This explains why *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, calls for enhanced dialogue with federal, provincial, and territorial, as well as private sector partners to improve the coordination of services across Canada to ease the burden of frequent postings. The Seamless Canada initiative was launched in 2018 to address these challenges.

The first Seamless Canada conference to collaborate with provincial and territorial representatives took place on June 27, 2018, at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. It was the initial step to implement an important pan-Canadian forum to establish channels of communication and to lay the groundwork for a continuous, collaborative framework between DND/CAF and the provinces and territories. Since then, Seamless Canada continues to evolve and progress with sustained commitment from all provinces and territories to address the main barriers to a smooth relocation experience.

Core Objectives

Addressing the needs of serving members and their families has framed the priorities for Seamless Canada. Through a range of surveys, three core objective themes have emerged amongst the many relocation challenges facing military families: spousal/partner employment, child and youth education (including childcare) and access to healthcare. The SCSC therefore focuses its attention on these themes. Engagements with the provinces and territories aim to reduce these traditional sources of stress and create a more seamless posting experience.

The following pages outline the main concerns identified by military spouses/partners, and the impacts on their families, which have informed the Seamless Canada initiative core objectives:

Spousal/Partner Employment

Employment opportunities

- Military spouses/partners often have difficulty finding gainful employment in a field that matches their education, experience and interests. Differences in employment opportunities between provincial/territorial jurisdictions can leave highly-educated spouses without work, under-employed, or without employment in their primary language. Job loss can lead to financial and mental health concerns, as well as contributing to family stress. In today's economic climate, Canadian families, including many military families, are reliant upon two incomes.

Professional Licensing and Recertification

- Additional licensing/certification requirements may exist for those transferring professional licenses during relocations. Spouses may require re-certification to maintain employment in the new provincial/territorial jurisdiction, leading to financial losses and out-of-pocket costs.

Seniority and Pension

- Most military spouses/partners are civilians who will have to leave their employment when their family is posted. Due to frequent relocations (average of moves are three times more than civilian families), military spouses/partners face challenges with the transferability of seniority and pensions. Loss of seniority influences employment conditions, pay scale, and long-term impacts to the advancement of their career. The inability to transfer pensions decreases financial security upon retirement.

Work/Life Balance

- Military spouses/partners are often unable to work due to the lack of childcare, which directly impacts the family's financial stability. Many face issues balancing household/caregiver responsibilities while their spouse is deployed, further compounded if they are searching for employment, due to the volume of their responsibilities and lack of support.

Retention

- Exit surveys show that many CAF members choose to leave their military careers due to spousal/partner employment barriers, contributing to the personnel shortages being experienced by the CAF, and impacting operational effectiveness.

Child and Youth Education

Curriculum Differences

- Each province and territory has unique curriculum and graduation requirements. No overarching regulation exists in Canada to govern the equivalency process. Compared to other Canadian students, military children changing school systems may experience learning gaps, need to repeat a grade or delay their graduation. All of this can have an adverse impact on a student's educational and personal development, as well as their mental health.

Individual Learning Plan

- Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to abrupt changes in their learning process. Military children with special needs may face interruptions to their individual learning plans or in some cases, have to be re-evaluated in their new educational environments. Special needs programs and classification vary by province and territory, and school boards are autonomous.

Childcare Access

- The Canadian childcare system has challenges related to access (availability, affordability, flexibility) and these challenges are further amplified for military families. With each posting, military families fall to the bottom of childcare waitlists. They may face lengthy periods without childcare, which can have profound impacts on overall quality of life especially when extended family are far away.

Emergency Childcare

- The working conditions of CAF personnel at times require immediate response, which can create significant pressures for after-hours/emergency on-call childcare, especially for dual-service couples, single parents and for children with special needs.

Post-Secondary Education

- Colleges and universities often offer lower rates for students residing in that province or territory. Military children who experience a relocation near or after entrance to post-secondary education may face challenges relating to residency requirements. Relocation may also impact their access to financial supports.

Access to Healthcare

Access to Physicians

- Exacerbating existing access challenges within the Canadian healthcare system, military families are required to access a new physician each time they move. Starting over means prolonged wait times, reliance on emergency departments and a lack of continuity of care.

Waitlists

- Families lose their place on family medicine and specialty care waitlists when posted.

Specialist Care

- Not all posting locations can offer the same access to specialized care, such as surgical care, mental health supports or services in a preferred language. Some families must travel great distances to retain a specialist, and not all services are covered through private insurance plans.

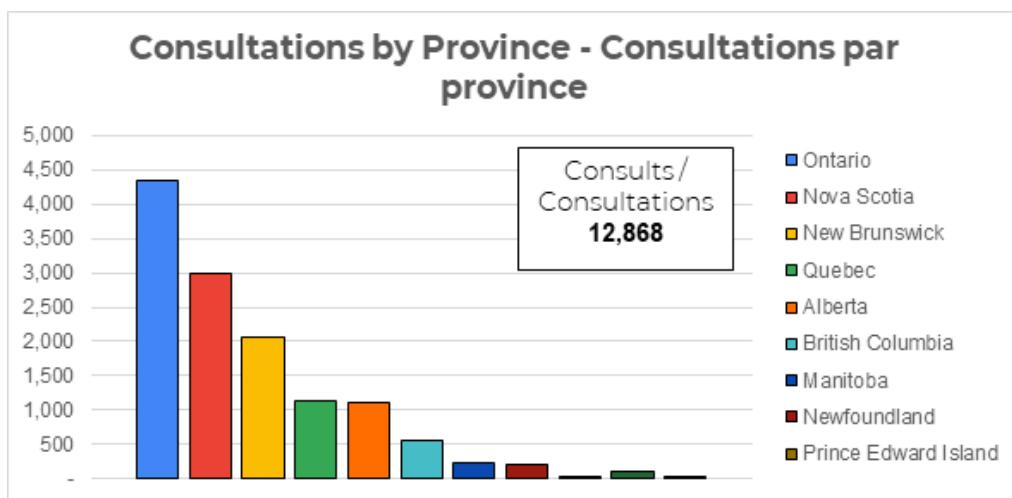
Continuity of Care

- Moving to a new community can interrupt care plans. A lack of standardization across provinces and territories can result in an interruption of treatment for military families.

Past Achievements

Commitment and participation in the SCSC from provinces and territories has been (and remains) crucial to the achievements of Seamless Canada. Significant efforts have been undertaken by all stakeholders to address relocation barriers faced when military families are moved to a new jurisdiction for duty related reasons. Some of the successes to date include:

- All provinces and territories have waived the 90-day waiting period for access to provincial/territorial healthcare. Now all military families become eligible for health cards immediately upon arrival in a new provincial/territorial jurisdiction. Some provinces and territories have application forms that recognize this new status, allowing for early self-identification as a military family. Health card information web pages for Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan all clearly state that the waiting period is waived, and military families are eligible for immediate coverage.
- Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) has negotiated a telehealth contract via the Maple telemedicine platform, ensuring timely access to virtual care. The Maple service augments what is currently available within the provincial and territorial healthcare systems, improving medical healthcare access for military families. The table below illustrates how many military families have used Maple so far:



- Autism Speaks Canada has produced a guide for military families, with the aim of helping students with autism spectrum disorder adapt to changes in their learning process.
- The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) is updating the Student Transfer Guide to reflect military children, which will provide current information on 13 education systems and secondary education course offerings in each province and territory.
- Seamless Canada raised awareness about Queen's University research into the posting impacts on adolescent students joining new schooling jurisdictions in Canada.
- DND has a Military Spouse Employment Initiative (MSEI) which provides access to federal public service jobs across the country.
- Work is underway at the federal, provincial, and territorial level, under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, to reduce the challenges related to credential recognition and re-licensing.

Year in Review

This was a significant year for Seamless Canada with the initiative achieving a number of key milestones. There were three valuable SCSC conferences held:

- Annual conference on June 14, 2022
- Semi-annual conference on December 5, 2022
- Annual conference on May 24, 2023

With the goal to introduce working groups on each of the themes in a deliberate organized manner to enable focused discussion, a Spousal/Partner Employment working group was introduced as a pilot in early 2023. The working groups will continue with a second working group focused on childcare. Some of the major accomplishments for this year include the adoption of the SCSC Terms of Reference, the appointment of the first provincial/territorial co-chair, and the creation and endorsement of a supporting governance framework.

Governance

Each province and territory have endorsed the SCSC's Terms of Reference, which serves as a governance framework to officially establish the SCSC as an intergovernmental body to encourage dialogue and coordinate efforts targeting relocation barriers for military families. The Terms of Reference lay out the objectives, membership, roles and responsibilities of participating delegates setting conditions for sustained discussion through working groups and subcommittees.

Many provincial/territorial jurisdictions signed the Terms of Reference on June 14, 2022. After the conference, virtual participants signed the document during signing ceremonies in their respective province or territory. The ceremonies were organized through partnerships with their respective CAF Regional Joint Task Force Commands in a way that amplified connections between the provinces and territories and local CAF leadership.

The governance framework outlines two annual conferences of the SCSC (one virtual and one in-person), two annual meetings at the senior-officials level, and monthly working groups to progress particular areas of focus.

Provincial Co-Chair

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the SCSC will now include the leadership of a representative from one of the provinces and territories to serve as the SCSC co-chair for a two-year rotational appointment. The first provincial/territorial co-chair, Minister Mary Wilson of New Brunswick, was appointed on June 14, 2022. Minister Wilson is the Minister of Service New Brunswick and Minister responsible for Military Affairs. As an MLA, her riding is Oromocto-Fredericton-Lincoln, which includes 5th Canadian Division Support Base – Gagetown, the second largest military base in Canada and the largest military facility in Eastern Canada. New Brunswick has long been a staunch supporter of CAF families. The province has promoted open lines of communications with the military community including local base leadership and the Military Family Resource Center, while playing a leadership role as part of CMEC to help students transfer more easily between different school systems. The establishment of a provincial/territorial co-chair is a tangible sign of the multiple jurisdiction nature of the SCSC, and the importance of provinces and territories in helping to reduce the relocation challenges that military families encounter. It is an important milestone in the sharing of responsibility for this initiative.

Working Groups

Theme-specific working groups were designed to assemble relevant, official working-level provincial and territorial experts around the table to discuss issues, share best practices and identify potential solutions to identified barriers while respecting the jurisdictional rights of each province and territory.

The working group on Military Spousal/Partner Employment met twice, on February 27, 2023, and April 24, 2023. The working group sought to gather data on challenges regarding access to provincial/territorial employment supports such as job search assistance, training programs and financial assistance programs.

The outcomes from the working group meetings held thus far have provided meaningful momentum regarding military spouse/partner employment. The dialogue facilitated the collection of information from the provinces and territories, and a better understanding of information required by provinces and territories to analyze their available assistance, which in turn will inform data collection in the future. The need to better articulate the impact of military postings on families was identified. To further discussions, a posting scenario document was developed to assist the provinces and territories in evaluating potential barriers to employment supports.

One potential barrier identified through the working group forum was the requirement in some provinces and territories to be a resident prior to accessing advanced employment supports such as skills development, training, and financial assistance. Often residency status is defined as the period after living for 90 days in the new province or territory.

The working group forum also provided the platform to share some of DND/CAF's efforts to support employment opportunities for military spouses. This includes CFMWS's Military Spousal Employment Network (MSEN), a virtual platform to which military spouses can self-identify, and national employers have access to, in an effort to streamline employment opportunities for military spouses/partners. Many provinces and territories were interested in this platform and have commenced discussions with CFMWS to consider joining the provincial/territorial public service to the MSEN offering another avenue of potential employment to military spouses/partners. Alberta has recently joined with more provincial/territorial jurisdictions expected to join soon.

Working group participants were also exposed to a second product, the Military Spouse Employment Initiative (MSEI), which is another virtual platform providing military spouses/partners a manner to self-identify for employment opportunities in the federal public service. Work is ongoing to ensure all federal departments are aware of the portal.

Other Areas of Progress

- CFMWS is expanding its education counsellor services to ensure students are prepared for the new school system.
- The Military Family Resource Centers on many bases and wings operate childcare centers. CFMWS has undertaken a comprehensive review of childcare supports with the aim of considering augmenting available supports.
- Development began on a Seamless Canada webpage to provide important resources and links for each province and territory related to Seamless Canada focus areas.

Year Ahead

Seamless Canada will continue to focus on increasing federal/provincial/territorial collaboration towards reducing some of the challenges for military families associated with relocations. This includes sustained efforts with the provinces and territories to address and identify barriers to employment. The year ahead will also mark the launch of a working group on child and youth education. This is expected to raise awareness on and propose solutions for issues associated with access to childcare for military families, as well as issues related to transfers between school systems.

The proposed 2023-2024 meeting schedule is outlined below:

SCSC Semi-annual Conference (virtual)	December 4, 2023
Spousal Employment Working Groups	June 26, 2023 August 28, 2023 October 30, 2023
Childcare Working Group	(TBC)
SCSC Annual Conference	May/June 2024

Conclusion

This past year was crucial in advancing Seamless Canada's mission to address relocation barriers for military families. The Terms of Reference outlines a robust governance framework to provide a deliberate and structured approach to support the Seamless Canada initiative. This in turn assists in keeping momentum and focus on finding innovative solutions to relocation challenges. The appointment of a provincial/territorial co-chair and the implementation of working groups has opened new avenues for provincial/territorial engagement, particularly in helping to address employment-related challenges.

Over the last year we have experienced overwhelmingly positive and sustained engagement and are delighted to continue this journey with provinces and territories. We are appreciative of their contributions to date. These advances have laid out a roadmap toward further successful cooperation with provincial/territorial partners, and potentially the private sector as well. While these complex challenges are governed by multiple jurisdictions and will take time to address, the Seamless Canada initiative will continue to advocate on behalf of military families.