



Program Overview

The importance of retention efforts within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is clear despite the lack of a comprehensive retention program. With the CAF's ambitious defence agenda outlined in *Our North, Strong and Free*, addressing personnel shortages and reducing unhealthy attrition are crucial steps to maintaining operational effectiveness and supporting Canada's defence mandate. These efforts will help ensure a strong and capable force for the future.



Evaluation Scope

The Evaluation of CAF Retention focused on identifying phases of attrition and the associated reasons for leaving the CAF. It assessed the alignment of best practices, theory and strategic direction within and across the CAF and determined whether these retention activities were effectively directed towards areas that impact retention. It further explored whether these activities are successful in enhancing retention.

The evaluation considered four main evaluation questions and two case studies: the **Naval Experience Program** (NEP) and the **Pilot Pay Restructuring Initiative**. For the purposes of this evaluation, only Regular Force members and voluntary releases were considered. The Evaluation of CAF Retention was undertaken in alignment with the 2016 Treasury Board Policy on Results.



Key Findings



Training delays and adapting to the CAF are key contributors to early attrition.



Geographic relocations and institutional dissatisfaction are key contributors to middle attrition.



There are limited strategies or activities being conducted to retain pension-eligible CAF members.



Local retention activities are being proactively implemented by unit-level commanders.



A lack of understanding of the Transition Group's roles, responsibilities and services is limiting its retention effectiveness.



The decision to amend the pilot compensation model lacked sound justification, consideration of alternate options and measures of effectiveness.



Overall Assessment

In 2022, the Chief of the Defence Staff introduced the CAF Retention Strategy (the Strategy) to improve personnel retention through coordinated efforts grounded in academic theory. The Strategy emphasizes enhancing commitment, satisfaction and work-life balance as key drivers to increase retention; however, its implementation has faced challenges due to limited awareness and the defunding of the Retention Program Office, which hindered coordination at the Level One level. A newly established Retention Secretariat will aim to facilitate efforts across the CAF to achieve reconstitution and operational readiness goals. Despite challenges, the CAF's overall retention efforts align with best practices and international standards. While the CAF is similar to Five Eyes partners in areas like health and wellness, it differs in its limited use of retention bonuses.

The report highlights key contributors to early attrition, including training delays and challenges in adapting to the CAF lifestyle. Middle attrition was found to be influenced by frequent relocations and dissatisfaction with operational conditions. Pension eligibility is a major factor for higher attrition among long-serving members, who often leave for better financial opportunities. Local commanders are implementing proactive retention activities, such as flexible working hours and early promotions, to help mitigate attrition. The CAF Transition Group (CAF TG) was found to be effective in supporting members with reconsidering releasing by addressing personal and professional concerns. Evidence shows that between November 2023 and April 2025, 518 members were retained through CAF TG.

The evaluation also considered two case studies: NEP and the pilot pay restructure. NEP gives candidates the opportunity to understand an occupation before selecting one, which may help mitigate some of the instances of early attrition noted. While the Royal Canadian Air Force launched a pilot pay restructure aimed at improving retention, it faced several challenges in its planning and implementation.



Recommendations

- 1 Force generators should explore the potential of developing a CAF experience program.
- 2 Establish a central repository for local commanders to share successful local retention activities.
- 3 CAF leaders should be thoroughly briefed on CAF TG roles, responsibilities and services to effectively support their members.
- 4 Military Personnel Command should establish a formalized process for compensation and benefit changes that includes participation and supporting evidence from responsible Level Ones.