

## Foreword

# From pandemic to endemic: learning from the past and preparing for the future

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After two years of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, we still have a lot to learn. Like all Canadians, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members have been profoundly impacted by SARS-CoV-2 and its variants in almost every facet of their lives. Beyond the impact of public health measures on everyday life, thousands of our members have now been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Despite these challenges, one principle that remains is our resolve to maintain a state of readiness to serve our country whenever and wherever we are called upon by our government. To date, CAF personnel have been deployed to long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario and to support northern and remote communities. CAF members have also assisted the Public Health Agency of Canada in managing and distributing personal protective equipment and vaccines and provided support with contact-tracing efforts.

This pandemic has, once again, reminded us of the importance of using science to inform decisions. The pivotal role that science plays in vaccine development, epidemiological methods used to monitor and contain the spread of the outbreak and in translating this knowledge to inform decisions in establishing public health guidelines in an effort to minimize transmission is paramount. At the Department of National Defence (DND), we have also relied on scientific evidence to protect our staff and CAF members. Peer-reviewed evidence has been invaluable in obtaining reliable intelligence to navigate through the peaks and valleys of the different waves as the pandemic continues to unfold.

While we all hope for a clean resolution to the pandemic, the recent emergence of the Delta and Omicron variants reminds us

that we still have work to do. To this end, staff at DND have initiated a number of projects specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic, four of which are part of this themed issue of *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada* dedicated to COVID 19-related research at DND:

(1) Dubiniecki and colleagues<sup>1</sup> describe a web-based tool (Canadian Armed Forces Surveillance and Outbreak Management System [CAF SOMS]) currently being evaluated for use in collecting and disseminating real-time data and collating it using a centralized electronic data management system. This tool is suitable for both disease surveillance and outbreak management and will enhance outbreak management capability beyond COVID-19.

(2) Fikretoglu and colleagues<sup>2</sup> describe the challenges faced in conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on their longitudinal study of CAF members deployed on the Operation (Op) LASER mission to provide support to civilian staff at long-term care facilities in Ontario and Quebec impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks.

(3) Lee and colleagues<sup>3</sup> conducted a survey to examine the concerns and general well-being of Canadian Armed Forces personnel and civilian Defence Team members as they adjust to the new working environment imposed by the COVID-19-related public health measures.

(4) Finally, Sudom and colleagues<sup>4</sup> investigated behaviours that were associated with higher levels of health and well-being of Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, and, with endemicity a likely endpoint,

we still have a lot to learn. Working together, sharing knowledge and continuing to contribute to the growing body of scientific evidence will help to pave the way to recovery and increase our resilience for the future.

## References

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