

# The Untold Stories of the Parents of Veterans: Leveraging Routinely Collected Health Data to Enhance Veteran and Family Health (REACH).



## Principal Investigator

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Dr. Alyson Mahar is an epidemiologist, Assistant Professor in the Health Quality Program at Queen's University School of Nursing, and Adjunct Scientist at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. Her research focuses on using routinely collected health and social data to address inequities in care for health care improvement in Canada. Dr. Mahar's program focuses on cancer care disparities, intersections between cancer and mental health/addictions, and the mental health of Canadian Armed Forces Veterans and military families. Dr. Mahar holds funding from CIHR, True Patriot Love, and other funding agencies to complete studies in these areas.

**FUNDING SPONSOR TRUE PATRIOT LOVE FOUNDATION**

## Project Summary and Impact

The work led by Dr. Mahar and her team blazed the trail for a new, permanent data sharing agreement between the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences to bring a measure of Veteran status into existing provincial health and social data in Ontario. This new access allows researchers, clinicians, and policymakers to implement more research into various aspects of Veterans' health and well-being. Evidence generated by these studies could lead to improved understanding of the long-term health benefits and harms of military service for Veterans, as well as the development of evidence-based policies and programs specifically tailored to meet their unique needs.

Funding from True Patriot Love for Dr. Mahar's work has led to initial comparisons of the health and health services use of Veterans living in Ontario. She and her research team have demonstrated the importance of considering both Veteran sex and length of service when making comparisons to non-Veteran populations.

**With funding from the Canadian Institute of Military and Veteran Health Research True Patriot Love (TPL) Research Initiative the Families Matter Research Group is working to improve research capacity and partnerships so that the families of those who serve, or who have served, across the military and public safety sectors, are getting the support that they need in a timely manner.**

## Key Findings Leading to Further Research

- **Canadian Veterans have higher use of health services after transitioning to civilian life compared to the general population.** [Click here to read the full article.](#) (Mahar, A. L., Cyr, K. S., Enns, J. E., Aiken, A. B., Whitehead, M., Cramm, H., & Kurdyak, P. (2022). Canadian Veteran chronic disease prevalence and health services use in the five years following release: a matched retrospective cohort study using routinely collected data. BMC Public Health, 22(1), 1-12.) <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-14053-4>
- **Female Veterans have different chronic health risks and engage in health services use more frequently than their male counterparts.** [Click here to read the full article.](#) (St Cyr, K., Aiken, A. B., Cramm, H., Whitehead, M., Kurdyak, P., & Mahar, A. L. (2023). Sex-specific differences in physical health and health services use among Canadian Veterans: a retrospective cohort study using healthcare administrative data. BMJ Mil Health, 169(5), 430-435.) <https://militaryhealth.bmj.com/content/169/5/430>
- **Canadian Veterans have a lower risk of cancer than the general population.** [Click here to read the full article.](#) (Mahar, A. L., Aiken, A. B., Cramm, H., Cyr, K. S., Shellenberger, J., & Kurdyak, P. (2022). Cancer incidence among Canadian Veterans: A matched cohort study. Cancer Epidemiology, 79, 102199.) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35700609>
- **Research design is important when comparing results between Veteran and civilian's health.** [Click here to read the full article.](#) (Cyr, K. S., Kurdyak, P., Smith, P. M., & Mahar, A. L. (2023). Mental health service use among Canadian Veterans within the first five years following service: methodological considerations for comparisons with the general population. Occupational and environmental medicine.) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37230751/>
- **Veterans who served less than five years had higher emergency department visit rates than non-Veterans, whereas Veterans who served for 30 years or more had lower emergency department visit rates than non-Veterans.** [Click here to read the full article.](#) (Saunders, J., St. Cyr, K., Cramm, H., Aiken, A. B., Kurdyak, P., Sutradhar, R., & Mahar, A. L. (2023). Investigating the association between Veteran status and rate of emergency department visits. Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health, 9(4), 63-76.) <https://jmvfh.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/jmvfh-2023-0007>

"This is very exciting as an epidemiologist and health services researcher," Dr. Mahar explained. "There are limitless opportunities for us to use this data and to raise the profile of Veterans as an important population for healthcare providers, policymakers and researchers to consider when conducting their own research. There is so much potential."

The Families Matter Research Group is an interdisciplinary team of clinicians and scientists whose research focuses on the needs of the families of Canadian Armed Forces members, Veterans and public safety personnel. Some of this research surround topics such as mental health, post-traumatic stress, operational stress, work-family conflict and trauma.

## Funding Sponsor

**TRUE PATRIOT  
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THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

True Patriot Love Foundation (TPL) is a national charity dedicated to providing essential support and resources to Canadian military members, Veterans and their families. TPL believes in supporting research, establishing evidence-based programs, and increasing access to programs and treatments dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of military personnel, Veterans, and their families.



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Canadian Institute for Military  
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CIMVHR is an innovative organization that engages existing academic research resources and facilitates the development of new research, research capacity and effective knowledge translation. CIMVHR has a network of academic researchers from across Canada and serves as the hub for 46 Canadian universities and 13 Global Affiliates who work together in addressing the health research requirements of the Canadian military, Veterans and their families.