



November 6, 2012

**AN OPEN LETTER TO
THE PRIME MINISTER, THE MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
AND THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**

For many years, The War Amputations of Canada, together with the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada (60 member-groups), has petitioned the government demanding that Veterans Affairs Canada substantially amend the appalling state of the regulations that govern the administration of the Last Post Fund.

It is self-evident that not only is it totally unacceptable that over two-thirds of all applications made for financial assistance are rejected, but the fact that the Last Post Fund provides only \$3,600 as a maximum award is abhorrently inadequate when compared to the actual cost of an appropriate funeral and burial in today's society.

It has also been the experience of The War Amps that even families of "Seriously Disabled Veterans" (those veterans who are in receipt of pensions exceeding 78 percent) such as war amputees encounter the same negative levels of success, given the extremely narrow and rigid position adopted by the government as to whether the death of the veteran was "service related."

It has been our long-standing position that a Seriously Disabled Veteran should be entitled as a matter of right to automatically receive funeral and burial benefits pursuant to the Veterans' Burial Regulations of the Last Post Fund. In our view, it is shameful that Veterans Affairs Canada places the families of such deserving veterans in the position of having to plead with their government in order to obtain financial assistance in these circumstances.

In our judgment, it is simply inconceivable that a Seriously Disabled Veteran's pensioned conditions did not play a part in his ultimate passing. This is particularly galling when one considers the fact that, during their lives, the Department recognizes the cumulative impact of the veteran's pensioned and non-pensioned conditions in



approving health care and treatment benefits on their behalf, but on death ignores the relationship in determining eligibility for the Last Post Fund assistance.

The War Amps has also worked closely with the Veterans Ombudsman, the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations in calling for extensive reform with respect to: 1) increasing benefits under the Last Post Fund to equate to the reasonable cost of a funeral and burial; 2) expanding eligibility rules as to income qualifications which are shockingly restrictive; and 3) removing unnecessary administrative complexities in the operation of the Last Post Fund.

As a personal note, it is extremely difficult to advise widows of deceased war amputees that not only has their claim for benefits under the Last Post Fund regulations been turned down, but also that they will not be receiving the Memorial Cross, which is issued by the government as a symbol of the personal loss and sacrifice that such widows are facing upon the death of their veteran husbands.

Indeed, there are a number of widows within The War Amputations of Canada who find it impossible to understand how it is that certain widows of the Association have received the Memorial Cross when others have not been so recognized. These are special widows in the veterans' community who, in the greater majority of cases, have taken care of their Seriously Disabled husbands for many years and yet, upon his passing, have failed to receive the Memorial Cross in recognition of their incredible contributions.

It is time that the Canadian government fulfills its "social contract" to our veterans and their dependants and addresses this long-standing injustice in the administration of the Last Post Fund so as to uphold the dignity and respect all Canadians feel our veterans deserve on their passing. At this sacred time of year when we honour and pay tribute to the sacrifices of our veterans, Government should be ashamed if economic or budgetary constraints are used as justification for a failure to act to remedy these inequities.

Sincerely,



Brian N. Forbes, B.Comm., LL.B.

Chairman, Executive Committee of The War Amps

Chairman, National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada

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