

# KEYNOTE



Plain language summary

Military and Veteran Health Research Forum 2022: Panel discussion

## CULTURE CHANGE: MORE THAN JUST A CHECKLIST

### OVERVIEW

Research into culture change in the Canadian defence and security sectors is undergoing a renaissance. While it is not a new topic, several catalysts have brought culture change to the forefront, including issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and legal cases that have highlighted the need to look at the problematic aspects of culture.

Researchers and representatives from the military and RCMP came together to discuss culture change at the opening plenary of the Military and Veteran Health Research Forum in Halifax, Nova Scotia in October 2022. The panel noted there is skepticism around culture change research and a strong sense that it needs to offer more than a checklist. It should examine attitudes, behaviours, and methodologies.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Culture change is a global, complex, and systemic issue. Military and Veteran health researchers have a responsibility to contribute evidence-based knowledge that will provide insights and point to inclusive and transformative solutions.

Both institutions were designed for white heterosexual married men with a specific number of children, but it's time for thinking to evolve to address gender diversity, harassment, racism, misogyny, and the needs of servicewomen in non-traditional roles. Culture change requires a fundamental shift in attitude and leadership. It means working toward the goal of rethinking, reimagining, and transforming institutional culture using a holistic approach to address the problem.

### CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE RESEARCH CULTURE

#### Members reported challenges when they asked for support

The panel discussed the importance of evolving the design of military and Veteran research beyond traditional norms. Today's research is still not diverse and inclusive enough to support and enable culture change. Researchers understand this and are working to address it. They know what is needed: diverse sampling, reporting that reflects diversity, and acknowledging the limitations. Research teams must set the conditions to ensure the research is meaningful and reflective of the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces' culture, context, and composition.

**The Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) works to engage academic and government researchers, facilitate new research, increase research capacity, and foster knowledge translation. CIMVHR hosts an annual Forum that brings together thought leaders to present new research, exchange ideas, share insights, learn, and collaborate with the shared objective of serving military and Veteran health needs.**

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## BUILDING MORE RESILIENT TROOPS THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The panel discussed the need for service delivery to evolve so diverse members of the RCMP and military truly feel welcome. These members must take part in the dialogue on inclusion in meaningful ways. With many people harmed by these institutions today, culture change must address institutional failures and ensure that everyone feels they belong. Building resilient troops and teams involves much more than diversity and inclusion measures; members must feel valued and have a voice. It's only through deep institutional change that this will happen.

## ENHANCING OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH CULTURE CHANGE

Across this sector, every institution is facing a recruitment crisis. Ultimately, this impacts operational effectiveness. It's not enough to get people in the door. The sector must create healthy cultures to attract and keep healthy people who can deliver on operations. To do so, it's critical to understand the connection between culture change initiatives and operational effectiveness.

One military panelist noted that many members feel the armed forces culture has had negative impacts on their health and well-being. The panel agreed there is a need for change. Institutions must focus on their people and rely on the evidence rather than see research as an attack on their organizations.

## TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO RESULTS

While there is a need to design culture change research from the ground up, researchers can draw on lessons learned:

- Take stock of how the research is conducted and what was done in the past.
- Communicate the research outside the research community to different audiences.
- Shift the power to the members who share their lives with researchers and with the organization.
- Conduct inclusive research that enables culture change.

Individual researchers, the research community, CIMVHR, the military, and the RCMP share a responsibility to produce and implement research that contributes to positive culture change. It's important to ask: How can our research be more inclusive? What voices and experiences are missing? How will this research shape the defence and security culture?

## KEY MESSAGES FOR LEADERS AND RESEARCHERS

- **Culture is always changing and adapting.** It's a journey that begins with the first step. Have difficult conversations and listen. Strive for progress, not perfection.
- **People need to feel a sense of belonging.** When a person truly feels they belong to an institution, they are not afraid to voice their opinions. They feel included. Everyone must have a voice.

# KEYNOTE

- **To deliver on operations, organizations need healthy people and a healthy culture.** It's important to rely on the evidence.
- **Plan, produce, and conduct inclusive research.** The research community must attract more diverse researchers and set the environment for inclusive research.
- **We can all impact institutional culture.** It's important to ask how to make the research more inclusive. Each person can make a difference in this field. Individual acts will add up to something more systemic. Research can be the foundation for culture change efforts.
- **Make connections and share the research.** Most organizations in this sector work in silos. Collaboration and knowledge sharing can yield much more impactful change. Communicate the research broadly for greater results.

## FURTHER READING

- **Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus):** This analytical process is used to assess how different women, men, and gender diverse people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives.
- **Sex, gender, and intersectionality questions for military and Veteran researchers:** This one-page tool offers guiding questions to help make research more inclusive and diverse. Source: Eichler, M. 2021. "Equity in military and Veteran research: Why it is essential to integrate an intersectional sex and gender lens," page 4, *Journal of Military Veteran and Family Health*, 7(Suppl 1) 2021.
- Forthcoming article from Dr. Karen D. Davis and Dr. Maya Eichler in the *Journal of Military Veteran and Family Health* titled, "The Case for Change: Reimagining Research to Transform Military Culture."

This is a plain language summary of the opening plenary panel discussion, "Culture change: More than just a checklist," at the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) Forum 2022 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

**Moderator:** Col (Retired) Heather Thorne-Albright, Canadian Armed Forces

### Panelists:

- **Dr. Karen Davis**, Defence Scientist, Director General, Military Personnel Research and Analysis, and Research Lead for the Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture, National Defence Canada
- **Vaughn Charlton**, Director General, Action Innovation and Modernization, Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- **Dr. Maya Eichler**, Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Social Innovation and Community Engagement, Mount Saint Vincent University
- **Chief Warrant Officer Bob McCann**, Command Chief Warrant Officer, Professional Conduct and Culture, Canadian Armed Forces

See the video: [CIMVHR Forum 2022 Opening Plenary](#)