

OTTAWA, Oct. 11, 2013 /CNW/ - The Honourable Julian Fantino, Minister of Veterans Affairs, today marked Mental Illness Awareness Week, which runs from October 6-12, 2013

"The health and well-being of Canada's Veterans and their families are a matter of great importance to our Government, and for the team of volunteers and organizers who work with us to support them," said Minister Fantino. "Initiatives such as Mental Illness Awareness Week are an important part of breaking past stigma so that Canadians can learn more about mental illness, understand the profound and lasting impacts it can have on them and their loved ones, and know where to find help."

Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) is an annual national public education campaign designed to help open Canadians' eyes to the reality of mental illness. Established in 1992, the week is coordinated by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), in cooperation with its member organizations and other supporters across Canada.

"The Military Minds Association continues its overarching mission of collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada and other care providers to connect our Veterans and their families to needed mental health services and ancillary programs," said John Wright, Chair of the Military Minds Association of Canada

"From operational stress to full blown post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the holistic needs can range from mental and physical health services to housing, financial and educational stewardship, employment and community reintegration all of which we are working with VAC and other key partners to achieve. In the last month alone, the new Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Honourable Julian Fantino

, has met with us three times to both listen and take action that have involved our constituents. In our parlance, he's put boots on the ground and that counts for more than anything else."

"VETS Canada has seen firsthand the positive results when homeless Veterans with mental illness receive the support they need," said Barry Yhard, Executive Director of

Veterans Emergency Transition Services (VETS) Canada

. "We welcome such initiatives as the VAC Return to Work Program and the Service Study as steps in countering some of the challenges facing our Veterans. It is hoped that Mental Illness Awareness Week sheds more light on the need for a team approach to combat mental illness and help Veterans and others before they become homeless."

Veterans Affairs Canada is actively engaged in a number of initiatives to help Veterans who are dealing with mental health issues, as well as their families. These include:

- supporting the University of British Columbia's Veterans Transition Program, a group-based residential treatment program geared toward Veterans with operational stress injuries;
- developing and launching, in partnership with the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Mental Health Association, the PTSD Coach Canada mobile app to help individuals and their families manage the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- partnering with St. John Ambulance Canada and Can Praxis to research the benefit of using dogs and horses to assist Veterans in dealing with mental health issues; and proceeding with a research assessment in
- partnership with the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) on whether psychiatric service dogs can be effective in treating PTSD.

"Our Government recognizes the seriousness of mental illness among Veterans and Canadian Armed Forces personnel and its impact on their families, and is committed to supporting them," added Minister Fantino. "I am very proud to support these important initiatives which will assist us in addressing the mental health needs of those who sacrificed so much for their country."

Over the years, Veterans Affairs Canada has greatly expanded its mental health services network. Today, Veterans with mental health conditions have access to specialized care services across the country, including assessment, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and ongoing care in a network of operational stress injury clinics.

For more information on the mental health services provided by Veterans Affairs Canada, visit veterans.gc.ca/eng/mental-health

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Written by Australian Business

Veterans Affairs Canada's support and services offer the right care at the right time to achieve the best results for Veterans and their families. Find out more at veterans.gc.ca.

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