

Summary Veterans Law.

On 11 February 2012, the Veterans Law was ratified. The formal name of this law is: the law that defines rules concerning the special duty to care for veterans. This law describes the duty of the government regarding the consequences that military deployment can have on the physical and psychological health of soldiers, even if those effects only become apparent after a long time.

The Veterans Law is an initiative of several political parties, who consulted with military unions and other organizations in the society, to gain support for this initiative. The purpose of the law is to create an integrated, proactive and preventive veterans policy. This bill has been supported by all parties in parliament and the Veterans Law was published officially in April 2012.

The integrated policy provides now one single address, to which a veteran can apply to with any question he may have. At the same time, this provides an opportunity to monitor whether the services are delivered in a timely and adequate manner.

The law also indicates, that the responsibility of the government should be aimed at the prevention of health problems as well as at providing assistance for the next of kin of the veterans. The rapid recovery of the veteran, but also the continued support for veterans with health problems is not dependent on the moment in time, at which these problems become manifest. This support includes material support, social support and mental health care, but also provides assistance with finding a new job. The law clearly defines who is responsible for what kind of assistance and care, and by this, the lines of responsibility and account are also clear.

This law applies to all former soldiers and for soldiers who are still in active service, and who have deployed in peacekeeping missions or in a war. This is an extension to the existing definition, in which only former soldiers are recognized as veterans.

It further stipulates that the Minister of Defence should promote appreciation and recognition for veterans by society, through a number of activities and facilities. Examples are the Dutch Veterans Day, the Veterans Insignia and the free railway tickets.

The responsibility to provide care

The responsibility to provide care is defined as an obligation duty of the government towards its military personnel and veterans. The assistance, support and care before, during and after deployment also involve the primary relations of the veteran. This is organized, for example, through information days, socio-medical and psychological support during and after deployment and through reunions and meeting, also for the home front.

The special responsibility to provide care

The special responsibility to provide care applies to veterans who return from their mission with physical or mental health problems. This support is aimed at restoring the possibilities to participate in social and professional life as soon as possible. A distinction is made between primary care, such as provided by a military doctor and social work, and care on a second, more specialized level, like the Military Mental Health Care or the Military Hospital.

Re-integration is provided by the so called Service Centre for Re-integration. The objective of this service is to find, as soon as possible, a suitable and appropriate position for personnel who can no longer be deployed for socio-medical reasons. It also sets out which financial claims can be brought forward regarding this disability (taking into account different degrees of disability).

National Veterans Care System

The National Care System for Veterans is a national network of health care institutions in the field of social services and of the military and civilian mental health care. The law stipulates that a veteran can apply to the so called Central Access Point of the Veterans Institute during 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The demand or need for care is assessed and, as a next step, the veteran will be guided to an institute that provides care that suits or fits the needs of the veteran best. In most situations, the

veteran is offered a choice between care provided by a military service or department or by a civilian institution.

Veterans Registration System

Furthermore, the Ministry of Defence is obliged to set up and maintain a Veterans Registration System. This guarantees that every veteran is identified, and it provides the means for the Ministry to communicate with every veteran. This data can also be used for policy or research. The law also stipulates that the Minister promotes scientific research into diseases or disorders related to the deployment as a soldier during a mission.

Other measures

The Law specifically offers the option to extend the employment for three months, to prevent a soldier from leaving the service, directly after returning from a mission. Further, it guarantees that a veteran will receive an income of 80% of the last earned salary, in case of disability and during reintegration.

A case coordinator supervises the implementation of all these measures, and this case coordinator monitors every step in the process. Also, a Veterans Ombudsman will be appointed, extending the possibilities for a veteran to submit a complaint regarding the acting and services of the government and of official public services. This function is accommodated by the National Ombudsman. The Veterans Ombudsman can conduct an inquiry or investigation on request of a veteran, or on its own initiative and he reports to both Houses of Parliament and to the Minister of Defence.

The law is currently (May 2013) elaborated in detailed legislation and administrative measures. Within two years after the law has become effective, an evaluation will take place on the effectiveness and impact of this law. From then on, this evaluation will take place every two year, thereby creating a legal base for the Veterans White Paper to be sent bi-annually to the Parliament..