

Audit finds 'gaps' in daycare, health services for Canadian Forces

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EXCERPTS:

Canadian military families may be described as the "strength behind the uniform," but Defence Department auditors have found significant "gaps" in their ability to access child and health care.

Military parents vent their frustration online about the difficulties in finding daycare for their children, from long waiting lists to the absence of emergency services.

While many non-military parents can relate, the situation for military families is exacerbated by frequent moves and temporary deployments. "The frequency of relocations and separations imposed by the military lifestyle can create disadvantages for military families as compared to non-military families," Defence Department auditors found in a report.

The same holds true for access to health care, spousal career support and education.

The auditors' report was written a year ago but was only recently posted online, and echoes issues identified by Canada's military ombudsman, who surveyed 370 military families and visited 10 bases before publishing a damning report in November.

National Defence spends about \$50 million to \$60 million each year on support programs to help military families deal with the "unique stresses" of the Canadian Forces lifestyle. Auditors found that the programs and services "do not explicitly address each of these high-needs areas and/or do not address them to a depth that will effect a significant reduction in support gaps in these key areas."

The auditors acknowledged better access to health care and issues related to spousal employment. "DND leadership and sustained effort will be required to make progress in addressing these systemic disadvantages to military families."

-reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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