

# Webinar

Organized by The Centre of Excellence on PTSD

Host: Graham Richardson

Speaker:

Captain (Ret'd) Robert A. Thibeau

Kathryn Linford

Dr. Robert Whitley

Dr. Patrick Smith

**Stay tuned!** Follow us on social media ([respectcanada](https://www.respectcanada.org)) and visit our website: [respectcanada.org](https://www.respectcanada.org)



## The Power of the Media: Impact on Veteran Stories

This virtual panel will lead a conversation featuring the storytelling perspectives of Veterans, Veteran Family Members, and journalists, as well as innovative research on the state of Veteran media coverage.

To (re)-see this webinar: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfLLwF1rnw&list=WL&index=1&t=99s&ab\\_channel=VeteransMentalHealth](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfLLwF1rnw&list=WL&index=1&t=99s&ab_channel=VeteransMentalHealth)

As part of a research to assess the tone and content of media coverage related to veterans' mental health - the findings of which will be used to design interventions that will help educate young journalists about issues related to veterans' mental health and suicide - this panel discussion reflects the perspective of a veteran, a veteran's partner, a researcher, and a journalist.

### Graham Richardson

CTV News Anchor

The subject of military personnel and veterans has not been of interest to the Canadian public for years. While Canada has only participated in less publicized missions since Korea, it was the situation in Somalia that brought the Canadian Forces into the spotlight. Then came Afghanistan, which highlighted the extent of the sacrifices, the costs, and the collective responsibility of Canadians to be involved with veterans.

Graham Richardson emphasizes the importance of individual stories that allow Canadians to identify with things they may know. What's more, these subjects, which touch us, are always more fascinating. The story of veterans is one that millions of Canadians can relate to both in terms of their choice to enlist and enlist and the issues of returning from missions and the issues of reintegrating veterans into society.

### Captain (Ret'd) Robert Thibeau

Captain Thibeau provides a historical review of the evolution of media coverage of Canadian military missions, showing that it has continued to evolve over the decades. The media has opened the door to incidents of harassment of soldiers

suffering from PTSD, as was the case at the time of the "Crazy Train" incident report. The media can therefore be a positive influence. However, as PTSD cases continued to rise, media reports sometimes sought to sensationalize these tragic stories. CAF members and veterans' groups viewed these actions as a breach of trust and a lack of respect for the privacy of victims and their families.

It is also important to note that Canada's indigenous populations have suffered from the tragedy of suicide for countless years. Yet, it was only when cases of military and veteran suicides became public knowledge that the governmental bodies of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of Defence and Veterans Affairs sought to create programs to assist and support them. Why were other government departments doing little to address this issue with Aboriginal populations?

Media exposure of the problems within the military ranks - with its unique and embarrassing problems - has prompted some jurisdictions to act, which they have and continue to do. However, PTSD and suicide in Aboriginal communities remain undiscussed and there is very little improvement. This is one area where the media could/should be pushing their communications.

### Kathryn Lindford

Co-founder of Couples Overcoming PTSD Everyday

As a military spouse and mother, Kathryn Lindford explains how military spouses are often silent partners. The media rarely covers this side of the story. The media needs to become more curious about the role of spouses and families

## The Power of the Media: Impact on Veteran Stories (continued)

who struggle with PTSD. Witness how strong and resilient they are. There is much more to the story than meets the eye.

### Dr. Robert Whitley

Associate Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University and Research Scientist – Douglas Research Centre

Dr. Whitley has been conducting research on media coverage of mental health for the past decade. From this research, we learn that a large body of international research from various countries indicates that media coverage of mental illness is fraught with stereotypes and biases. This media coverage has the potential to shape the general public's attitudes towards mental illness.

Over the past ten years, Dr. Whitley has worked closely with the Canadian media to try to catalyze changes in the way mental illness is portrayed in general. In the most recent study conducted, it appears that media coverage of mental illness has improved over the past 15 years.

Now, according to research conducted in the United States, when talking about military veterans in that country, there seems to be a tendency to focus on the negative aspects. Some studies show that the typical portrait of a veteran is one of an angry, withdrawn, bitter person. Here in Canada, we don't really know how the media portrays mental illness in veterans. There has not yet been any systematic research on this issue, which is why Dr. Whitley, and his team, are conducting a two-year study to analyze the tone and content of the Canadian media and how it reports on veterans, their mental health and how it reports on veteran suicide.

The results of this study are forthcoming.