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**Opinion Editorial  
For Immediate Release**

**Legion concerned about Agent Orange compensation  
by  
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**Ottawa** – The Royal Canadian Legion has become concerned about the budget allocated for Agent Orange compensation. It would seem that the allocated funds, which have not all been spent through the ex-gratia payments made by the federal government as compensation for exposure to the chemical, will lapse with no benefits for veterans.

The Legion was at the forefront in advocating for this compensation and applauded the federal government for its initiative on this issue. But it was concerned on two fronts – the period of eligibility was much too restrictive, and the criteria to allocate these payments was much broader than the test applied to compensate veterans through the disability benefit system where the cause must be proven rather than inferred.

Regardless of our concerns on these issues we considered this a good first step but have lately reviewed our stance on this issue because the budget allocated was only partially spent, and that which is left over will not be used to fund benefits for veterans that can prove the damage caused by contact with this chemical.

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In addition, the Legion has since become aware that the United States Veterans Administration (USVA) is providing much broader disability benefits for veterans who were exposed to this chemical than Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). For instance, more than 250,000 U.S. veterans are getting compensation for diabetes according to the records held by USVA. In fact more Vietnam veterans are being compensated for diabetes than for any other malady including post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing loss or general wounds.

Tens of thousands of other claims for common ailments of age are getting paid as well because of a possible link to exposure, direct or indirect, to Agent Orange. Erectile dysfunction is one of them, and the USVA will soon add heart disease, Parkinson's disease and certain types of leukemia to the list of conditions that might be connected to this chemical.

As is the case for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS or more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease), the U.S. and Australia have a formal process to review eligibility guidelines for disability benefits. But VAC has no formal review mechanism and continues to turn its back on a very small number of ALS sufferers that deserve rapid intervention.

It also turns its back on those veterans exposed to Agent Orange who have developed consequential disabilities such as diabetes, and the other ailments listed herein.

So why is there no formal process in Canada while the money set aside

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to compensate veterans is still unspent? The USVA publishes its proposed rulings and planned amendments to the regulations by posting draft rulings with effective implementation dates and seeks public input on-line or in person. A timely process to establish and confirm the linkage between military service and disability conditions is the norm in both the U.S. and Australia. Why not in Canada?

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