



Veterans Affairs
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NEW VETERANS CHARTER EVALUATION - PHASE II

Final: August 2010



Canada A stylized logo for Canada, with the word "Canada" in a bold, black serif font and a small red maple leaf icon positioned above the letter "a".



*This report was prepared by the
Audit and Evaluation Division*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Audit and Evaluation Division would like to acknowledge the support and contributions made by VAC staff from across the country as well as from Client Advisory Groups, staff from the Canadian Forces and Focus Group participants.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Veterans Charter (NVC) represents the most sweeping change to Veterans' benefits and services in the past 60 years. The NVC shifts the focus from one of disability to one of wellness and responds to Canada's commitment to injured Canadian Forces members and Veterans. The suite of services and benefits available under the NVC include a lump-sum disability award, rehabilitation, financial benefits, health benefits, and career transition services.

This is a three-phased comprehensive evaluation being conducted from April 2009 to December 2010. The Phase I report focussed on the relevance and rationale of the NVC and its programs. This Phase II report focuses on outreach, the application process and service delivery framework. The Phase III report will focus on the success in achieving desired outcomes and any unintended impacts. The findings from these reports are intended to improve the design and delivery of the NVC programs and the evaluation will fulfill a departmental commitment. Additionally a separate evaluation comparing the Disability Award program to the Disability Pension program has also been completed.

Outreach is an effort by individuals in an organization to share information or provide education as well as engage particular groups. The Department participates in a wide range of outreach activities most of which are initiated and supported in the district and regional offices. In 2008, an NVC outreach strategy was developed but implemented to varying degrees across the country. Transition interviews and the functioning of Integrated Personnel Support Centres were identified as effective methods of reaching out to releasing members. However, there remained gaps concerning NVC outreach activities for previously released members and families.

VAC messaging needs to continue to be consistent, multi-channelled and presented at multiple points in time to ensure clients avail themselves of VAC programs when appropriate. Fully implementing an outreach strategy, supported by a performance measurement strategy, will ensure consistency and appropriate coverage of key audiences. In addition, information collected from a performance measurement strategy should be used to plan, coordinate and target NVC messaging to ensure resources are being expended in effective manner to reach key audiences.

The suite of NVC services and benefits required an application form to be completed for each program. The evaluation team found that Canadian Forces members and Veterans were struggling to complete the numerous forms, especially those individuals with health issues who required additional support. Applicants who were able to

complete the forms expressed frustration with the duplication such as the requirement to provide basic tombstone data multiple times throughout the process. It was identified that the current online process for disability benefits was ineffective, incomplete and actually more cumbersome than the paper application which resulted in additional work for staff and longer turnaround times for clients. Also, the absence of any claims preparation before the Earnings Loss applications are processed at Head Office is inefficient and creates longer turnaround times.

Policy and process intent have changed in recent years in response to the dramatic shift in client demographics. In order to support consistent quality, client service operational staff need to better understand the roles and responsibilities of functional specialists, receive nationally coordinated skills-based training, and have improved access to up-to-date policies and business processes. In addition, VAC is currently revising the delegated authorities to allow for more timely decision making. As part of these revisions to the delegated authorities, developing a strong quality assurance process is necessary to ensure that any future changes aimed at improving efficiency do not come at the cost of reducing the quality and consistency of decision making.

Based on the findings presented in the Phase II report, the following ten recommendations were identified. Currently, the Department is in the process of re-engineering service delivery to reduce complexity, strengthen partnerships and align with client demographics. The Management Action Plans that appear in this report have been developed based on the information currently available. However, future decisions resulting from this re-engineering could require changes to some of the identified action steps or timeframes.

Recommendation 1 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, in consultation with the Service Delivery Management Division and the Communications Division, fully implement an outreach strategy with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities and is supported by adequate resources and a performance measurement plan.

Recommendation 2 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, in consultation with the Service Delivery Management Division and the Communications Division, plan, coordinate and target NVC messaging to ensure resources are being expended in an effective manner to reach key audiences.

Recommendation 3 (Essential)

It is recommended that a review be conducted by the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division, in consultation with the Program Management Division and the Centralized Operations Division, to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and complication in the application process for the NVC programs.

Recommendation 4 (Essential)

It is recommended that the process for applying for earnings loss be reviewed and revised by the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division in consultation with the Centralized Operations Division and the Program Management Division with a view to improving efficiency.

Recommendation 5 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division improve the current online application process.

Recommendation 6 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division in consultation with the Program Management Division, develop, resource and sustain a National Learning Program for the New Veterans Charter.

Recommendation 7 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division develop and implement a process to streamline access to current policies, business processes and directives and more effectively identify and communicate changes.

Recommendation 8 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division clarify and communicate the purpose and composition for the interdisciplinary team.

Recommendation 9 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division, clarify the role of health professionals and functional specialists in relation to the NVC programs and to each other and more effectively communicate when to consult with these positions.

Recommendation 10 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division in consultation with Service Delivery Management Division, Policy Division and Finance Division complete the modifications to the delegation of authority for the New Veterans Charter and implement the revised authority with a supportive framework which includes a comprehensive quality assurance component.

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW VETERANS CHARTER

The New Veterans Charter (NVC), represents the most sweeping change to Veterans' benefits and services in the past 60 years. The NVC shifts the focus from one of disability to one of wellness, and responds to Canada's commitment to injured Canadian Forces (CF) members and Veterans. The suite of services and benefits available under the NVC includes a lump-sum disability award, rehabilitation, financial benefits, health benefits, and career transition assistance. A summary description of each NVC program is presented in Annex B.

The expected outcomes from VAC's modernized programs, are that CF members, Veterans and their families:

- experience improved health status and functional capacity as a result of access to treatment benefits and rehabilitation services;
- actively participate in the civilian workforce (unless totally disabled or retired) as a result of access to employment-related supports in the form of vocational assistance, training and job placement assistance;
- have a level of income adequate to meet basic needs as a result of enhanced employment opportunities provided by job placement assistance, and access to employment enhancement supports such as re-training opportunities as part of vocational rehabilitation;
- actively participate in and integrate into their communities; and
- feel recognized for their contribution.

Table 1.1 (page 2) provides a snapshot of the clients who utilized the various NVC programs during the 2009-2010 fiscal year. It should be noted that the total number of clients is not intended to be the summation of the clients in each program, as clients can access multiple programs at the same time or various programs separately based on their needs.

Table 1.1 – NVC clients as of March 31, 2010

Clients	Clients who received a Disability Award	Clients in the Rehabilitation Program	Clients receiving Financial Benefits	Clients receiving Health Benefits	Clients in the Career Transition Services Program*	Total Number of NVC clients
Released before April 1997	9,326	744	461	273	N/A	9,794
Released from April 1997 – March 2001	658	295	173	58	N/A	860
Released from April 2001 to March 2006	838	703	325	120	6	1,362
Released after April 2006	2,790	1,566	453	342	221	3,732
Still Serving	4,956	37**	21**	6**	198	5,159
Survivors / Spouses	386	72	160	13	1	510
Total	18,954	3,417	1,593	812	426	21,417

* Numbers represent clients who applied for the Career Transition Services program (ie. career counselling or job finding assistance). This does not include the 713 clients who attended a workshop.

** Data error. Still serving members are not eligible for the rehabilitation, financial benefits or health benefits programs.

Still serving members are eligible for a disability award and components of the Career Transition Services Program, but they are not eligible for the Rehabilitation, Financial Benefits or Health Benefits Programs. Also, there are no clients currently in the Career Transition Services Program who released prior to 2001 because eligibility is limited to within two years of release from service.

Some additional observations noted are that clients who received a disability award would have been eligible to receive a disability pension prior to the NVC. In addition, some disability conditions such as hearing loss do not develop until many years after release which explains the large number of clients receiving an award in 2009-2010 who released prior to 1997. It should also be highlighted that 72 survivors or spouses were able to access support through the Rehabilitation Program. This support was not available prior to the introduction of the NVC.

2.0 STUDY APPROACH

2.1 Evaluation Context

This is the first evaluation of the NVC and the findings will assist Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) program managers to improve the design and delivery of the NVC programs and provide an assessment of the achievement of desired outcomes. In addition, this evaluation fulfills a Departmental commitment to complete a comprehensive evaluation of the NVC before December 2010.

Prior to commencing this evaluation, an evaluation framework and a detailed plan were developed. Given the size and complexity in conducting this comprehensive evaluation, the work will be completed in three phases with a report developed for each phase. Phase I, completed in December 2009, focused on the relevance and rationale of the NVC and its programs. This report, Phase II, focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of VAC's outreach, application process, and the service delivery framework. The final report, Phase III, will focus on unintended impacts and the success in achieving desired outcomes.

While this is the first evaluation of the NVC, other related work has recently been completed or is currently underway. The Audit and Evaluation Division recently completed a review of the NVC Redress process and a comparative analysis of the Disability Pension and Disability Award programs. In addition, VAC has completed an internal review of case management and an evaluation of case management is planned for 2011-2012. As a result, all the areas noted above were not included in the scope of this evaluation.

2.2 Scope of Work

The core evaluation issues and specific evaluation questions which will be covered by this evaluation are presented in the table below.

Table 2.1 - NVC Evaluation Questions	
Core Evaluation Issues	Evaluation Questions
Continued Need for the Program	Phase I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the need for each of the NVC programs?
Alignment with Government Priorities	Phase I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent does the NVC align with Government priorities?
Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities	Phase I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent does the NVC align with Government priorities?• Is there duplication or overlap with other programs or services?
Achievement of Expected Outcomes	Phase I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there unmet needs which should be covered by the NVC?• How do the NVC programs compare to similar programs offered by other countries?• How is program performance measured? Phase II <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there appropriate supports in place for operational staff delivering the NVC programs?• Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined and appropriate?• How efficient and effective is the application process? Phase III <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How efficiently and effectively does VAC assist clients in transitioning from military to civilian life?• Are the NVC programs adequately supporting all NVC clients?• How satisfied are clients with the NVC programs?• How does the effectiveness of VAC's NVC programs compare to other similar programs?• What are the unintended impacts that have occurred?
Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	Phase II <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How efficient and effective is VAC's outreach?• How efficient and effective is the application process? Phase III <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How efficiently and effectively does VAC assist clients in transitioning from military to civilian life?• What are the inputs and outputs?

2.3 Methodology

To strengthen the governance of this project, a Steering Committee consisting of VAC's senior management was formed to monitor progress and provide strategic direction to the evaluation. In addition, an Advisory Committee was formed consisting of Directors from Head Office, regional and district offices across the country. The role of the Advisory Committee is to support the fieldwork and provide input into the development of data collection tools and evaluation findings. These two committees will support all three phases of the evaluation.

The scope of Phase II covers the period from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2010. The data collection methodology incorporated included: key informant interviews, discussions with Client Advisory Groups, focus groups with clients, documentation review and data analysis. Utilizing these multiple lines of evidence ensured the reliability of information collected and results reported. Fieldwork for this report was conducted between November 2009 and April 2010.

For this phase, key informant interviews served as a primary source of information. These interviews provided qualitative input from staff involved with NVC across the country and also provided context to the documentation review and data analysis. For NVC, outreach activities, program application and service delivery occurs primarily in VAC's 27 districts, including Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs), which meant that findings could vary by office due to differing site characteristics. As a result, input was collected from a broad cross section of staff across the country. In total, 165 interviews were conducted with staff from Head Office, all regional offices, 12 district offices, four IPSCs, Operational Stress Injury Support Service and the Canadian Forces. The site selection criteria as well as the specific offices included are presented in Annex C.

Client Advisory Groups were a key source of information regarding the client's perspective. Prior to this evaluation, VAC had already established a NVC Advisory Group and Special Needs Advisory Group responsible for reviewing VAC programs and providing advice. These two groups consisted of representatives from Veterans organizations, academics, researchers, service providers and clients. As part of this role, these groups have prepared several reports summarizing their findings and recommendations. These reports were reviewed as part of the analysis conducted by the NVC evaluation team. In addition, after reviewing these reports, discussion groups were conducted separately with both groups to collect their input specific to the NVC evaluation.

Focus groups were also utilized as a key source of client input. An external consultant was engaged to ensure the confidentiality of client input. A set of twelve focus groups were conducted in four locations. Four groups were conducted in Halifax and Quebec City (French), and two groups were conducted in each of Cold Lake and Mississauga. The target audiences were: CF members who recently participated in a transition interview, Veterans of the Regular Force released prior to the implementation of the

NVC, Veterans of the Regular Force released after the implementation of the NVC, Veterans of the Reserve Force, spouses or survivors and participants of the Job Placement Program (now called Career Transition Services). The consultant's report, including detailed methodology, is presented in Annex G. These focus groups collected valuable client input in relation to outreach, the application process and service delivery with key findings summarized in sections 4.1 to 4.3. The focus groups collected the client's perspective on recognition, community integration and satisfaction with services provided. This information is also presented in the report and will support the analysis of outcomes in Phase III.

A documentation review was conducted to provide context and understanding of the current processes. Primary sources for the documentation review included: NVC legislation, VAC policies and business processes, developed frameworks or draft documents, the results of relevant internal reviews and program process maps. Data analysis was used to quantify findings and provide additional information to support qualitative comments made during interviews or focus groups. This information was derived with the support of VAC's Statistics Directorate.

3.0 SUMMARY OF PHASE I

The Phase I report, released December 2009, focused on the relevance and rationale of the NVC and its programs. As part of this evaluation, the alignment of the NVC with federal priorities was assessed, as well as the need for each NVC program. The evaluation team also conducted a review of similar benefits and services offered by other federal departments and a comparative analysis to the services and benefits available to Veterans in other countries. Finally, in preparation for Phase III, an assessment of the Department's measurement of program performance for the NVC programs was performed to ensure that the required outcome information would be available. Based on this analysis, the following seven recommendations were identified:

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, complete a comprehensive needs assessment related to career transition services for Veterans.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, further explore the identified overlap with other federal programs to identify opportunities to enhance efficiency and service delivery to clients.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister – Policy, Programs and Partnerships Branch, review and reconcile the Department's role in supporting the needs of families in relation to the services and benefits currently available.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the Director General, Policy and Research Division, prepare options and costings as to whether to provide additional support for clients and families who cannot afford to access the Health Benefits Program.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the Director General, Policy and Research Division, reassess if dental coverage should be proposed as a component of the New Veterans Charter.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, more clearly define the NVC desired outcomes and finalize and implement the corresponding logic models and performance measurement plans for all five programs.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that Director General, Program Management Division, identify and implement opportunities to improve the utility of information collected from the Client Re-establishment Survey.

4.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations relating to the evaluation of outreach, the application process and the service delivery framework as it relates to the NVC.

4.1 Outreach

4.1.1 Outreach Strategy

Outreach is an effort by individuals in an organization to share their ideas or practices with other organizations, groups, specific audiences or the general public. Outreach often encompasses an educational aspect but, it is increasingly common for organizations to incorporate engagement of particular groups rather than solely disseminate information or provide an education component.

In 2008, feedback from various individuals and groups indicated a need for re-invigorated outreach efforts to ensure that NVC clients are aware of the programs and supports available to them. In response to this need, an outreach strategy for the NVC programs was developed. This strategy focused on three key audiences: clients and potential clients, media and Parliamentarians. These groups were recognized as having unique information needs that should be addressed through various outreach efforts and communication tools.

External activities were supported by an internal outreach to educate VAC staff to the needs of CF clients and help fill gaps in their knowledge about resources available to injured and releasing members. Highlights of the strategy included:

- an identified network of speakers across the Department;
- training sessions for this network of speakers;
- standardized presentations with case scenarios tailored to specific groups;
- improvements to the NVC sections of the intranet and internet;
- identifying Ministerial/Parliamentary opportunities for outreach;
- VAC features in various publications such as *Salute!*, and *The Maple Leaf*; and
- tracking of outreach activities and results.

Regions determined their outreach priorities based on needs and resources. This approach encouraged flexibility; however, the risk of delivering inconsistent information existed. A national outreach steering committee was struck to discuss tools, best practices and to promote consistency. Staff noted the benefit of this forum. With organizational realignment in the spring of 2009, roles and responsibilities for outreach were less defined and the role of the national committee faltered. Best practices and innovative approaches were not being shared as the committee has not met since September 2009.

Each region was to develop an action plan taking into account regional priorities. However, these regional action plans were developed to varying degrees and without specific direction and resourcing, implementation varied across the country. Currently, the district offices incorporate NVC outreach activities into their workload to the extent possible. There is a limited budget to cover costs for travel and overtime for staff to conduct outreach activities making it challenging in some areas to respond to all requests or to be proactive in terms of outreach. Some staff identified that they are struggling to balance service delivery with outreach activities.

In the spring of 2010, the 2008 Outreach Strategy was in the process of being reviewed and re-invigorated. This updated outreach strategy will focus on Veterans, still serving CF Members, families; Veterans' organizations; and Canadians/Parliamentarians. This new version of the strategy will build on current outreach activities as well as incorporate new initiatives.

VAC's Policy, Programs and Partnerships (PPP) Branch and the Communications Division will be responsible for updating the strategy and Service Delivery and Commemoration (SDC) Branch will have a large role in coordinating and implementing the strategy at the local and regional level. For this strategy to be effective further development and input from staff at the local and regional level will be required. An integrated approach with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities is necessary for staff to carry out their roles and to ensure coherence and consistency of information and messages across all channels of communication.

A performance measurement strategy for NVC Outreach has not been developed. Such a strategy is required to monitor and assess the results of outreach activities. Development and implementation of a performance measurement system would support informed decision making and facilitate action to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the NVC outreach.

Conclusion

In 2008, an NVC Outreach Strategy was developed but not fully implemented. Outreach is a shared responsibility among PPP, Communications Division and SDC. PPP and Communications developed the strategy. SDC and Communications, particularly at the district and regional levels, are involved in the coordination and implementation of activities. Roles and responsibilities were neither clear nor defined, and dedicated financial resources were not available for outreach activities. In addition, district offices had limited resources to cover travel and overtime costs associated with outreach. Therefore, the number and locations of activities were limited. Although there is value in local areas tailoring activities to their perceived regional needs, a national focus and direction is required to ensure consistency and appropriate coverage for the various unique client groups. Sharing of best practices and innovative approaches were limited. Due to these factors, the strategy was only implemented to

varying degrees across the country. Finally, there was no performance measurement strategy in place to support informed decision making to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the NVC outreach.

Recommendation 1 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, in consultation with the Service Delivery Management Division and the Communications Division, fully implement an outreach strategy with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities and is supported by adequate resources and a performance measurement plan.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

It is acknowledged that there is a need to enhance the current New Veterans Charter (NVC) Outreach Strategy (approved in 2008) to address the gaps that have been identified in awareness and understanding of the NVC programs and services, which are creating barriers to access. NVC Outreach will be a major component of an enhanced VAC Outreach, which has the following objectives: to raise awareness of services and benefits provided by VAC among key target audiences, to provide easier access to information on VAC services and benefits in language that is easy to understand, and to educate clients about how to apply and access VAC services and benefits.

Program Management Division, in conjunction with the Communications Division and the Service Delivery and Commemoration Branch will develop an enhanced VAC Outreach Strategy that will be adequately resourced to make information about VAC programs and services (in particular NVC programs and services) more client- and less program-focussed. Roles and responsibilities will be clearly outlined. The Outreach strategy will employ a multi-channelled, phased-in approach to reach our clients, with targeted activities at various times, and will focus on proactive, positive clear messaging about VAC's (with emphasis on NVC) programs and services.

The approach to external audiences will be multi-faceted, capitalizing on the existing partnership with the CF and RCMP, as well as the networks of major Veterans' organizations, and opportunities available through Commemorative and other events. It will engage VAC's senior management cadre, and target the unique outreach needs of specific client groups, including CF members, Veterans, Reservists and their families, as well as traditional Veterans and their caregivers. VAC will collaborate with DND in the development and delivery of specific messaging for each of these client groups, and in identifying new outreach opportunities.

A performance measurement plan will be developed and outreach activities and messaging will be adjusted based on feedback and monitoring.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
1.1 Consistent with the Department's Transformation agenda and the recommendations of the Independent Assessor, Program Management Division, in conjunction with Service Delivery and Commemoration Branch, and Communications Division, will assign resources to develop the enhanced strategy, action plans for implementation, and targeted messaging for key audiences.	Program Management Division	Complete
1.2 The 2008 NVC Outreach Strategy will be updated to address gaps in awareness and understanding that have been identified; establish a multi-faceted, phased-in approach to reach our clients; provide clear messages about VAC, in particular, NVC programs and services. This updated strategy will ensure outreach products and activities are being expended in an appropriate manner and targeted to specific audiences	Program Management Division	December 2010
1.3 A performance measurement plan will be developed and outreach activities and messaging will be adjusted, based on feedback and monitoring.	Program Management Division	March 2011

4.1.2 Outreach Activities

During the period when a CF member is transitioning from military to civilian life, they may require the provision of transition services and support. In response to these needs the Department has provided a range of services including the Transition Interview. The Transition Interview is a one-on-one interview between a releasing member and a VAC employee to identify transition issues and make appropriate referrals to address any unmet needs.

Transition Interviews are scheduled in coordination with the Department of National Defence (DND) and are viewed as an important outreach opportunity to explain VAC services and benefits. The Department has been very successful in ensuring that almost all medically released members (94% in 2009-2010) received a Transition Interview. Table 4.1 provides additional detail regarding Regular Forces Releases and Transition Interviews. However, it was noted that there are still gaps in providing this service for some voluntary releasing members and Reservists. Staff indicated that the release period for a voluntary releasing member can be as little as 30 days which creates some difficulties in scheduling a Transition Interview. For Reservists, the release process is different than for Regular Force members and VAC was not always aware when Reservists were releasing. However, DND is making changes to align the two release processes, which is expected to improve transition services to Reservists.

Table 4.1 - Transition Interviews by Release Type

Regular Force Releases*	Medical	Other	Total Release	Total Transition Interviews	Percentage of Releases Receiving a TI
2008/2009	1,058	5,065	6,123	4,760	78%
2009/2010	915	4,322	5,237	3,864	74%

*Does not include Reservists as release data for this group is not available.

Spouses/partners are invited to attend the Transition Interview. The family, as well as the releasing member may be experiencing transition issues or have questions on VAC's services and benefits. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors such as child/work responsibilities and military culture, few spouses/partners participate in the interview. The importance of spousal attendance at the Transition Interview especially for members with Occupational Stress Injuries is recognized and in these situations, staff make an additional effort to encourage spousal attendance.

The opening of the Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs) has improved the exchange of information between VAC and the CF and has provided an opportunity to improve partnerships with various stakeholders. Feedback from both VAC staff and

DND personnel are very positive about how the IPSCs are working and the resulting service improvements for clients.

Transition Interviews were supported by staff who felt the interviews are a good method of reaching releasing members. Information from focus groups also supports this conclusion. A number of participants indicated information they received during the Transition Interview assisted with their transition to civilian life. Focus group suggestions for improvement included the Department providing more information on the purpose of the interview in advance so that members could be better prepared with questions. There was also support for VAC contacting releasing members six months to one year after the interview to provide additional transition support. Members are very busy during the release process and may not have time to focus on VAC's information.

In addition to Transition Interviews, CF members are provided with information on VAC services and benefits in pre-deployment and post-deployment briefings as well as Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN) briefings. VAC has developed standardized presentation decks for staff to use during outreach presentations. These decks are tailored to meet the information needs of the various client groups served by the Department and have helped staff deliver a consistent and tailored message across the country. However, not all staff were aware of the availability of these information decks nor how to access the most current versions. Stakeholders noted that presentations with less detail and a more experiential focus would increase engagement for members who would identify with the situation being presented. Additional presentation material for groups such as families and other client groups have been developed but were not finalized. Also staff expressed frustrations with technology issues when coordinating presentations with DND. This included problems with VAC encryption not being compatible with DND presentation equipment. Some staff expressed the need for training on public speaking, program knowledge and military culture in order to improve their confidence and effectiveness in presenting VAC outreach messages.

In addition to Transition Interviews and presentations to CF members, VAC staff were involved in a variety of additional outreach activities ranging from preparation of media information to homeless initiatives. Engagement of staff in outreach activities was high and a number of suggestions on additional activities have been compiled and are presented in Annex D.

Analysis of comments from staff, stakeholders and focus groups revealed that VAC client groups are varied and unique. There does not appear to be one best channel to provide information or outreach messages, so there is a need to use a multi-channelled approach. Individuals require messages presented in a wide variety of formats and channels to ensure VAC is reaching all those who may benefit from the NVC programs.

Focus group participants frequently suggested that VAC share information with CF members earlier in the release process so they can better prepare for release. In fact,

these suggestions included timing options for a Transition Interview as early as two years prior to release. In addition to focus group comments, stakeholders and staff provided a wide variety of opinions regarding the opportune time to present NVC materials and messages. The consistent trend noted from all groups was that repeated messaging is essential. Clients' receptivity to program information is based on individual needs and unique circumstances so VAC must provide multiple opportunities that allow them to internalize the message.

It was noted that NVC outreach activities were not specifically directed to previously released members. VAC's homeless initiatives have provided an opportunity to reach out to a sub-section of this group as do briefings to Veteran organizations and publications such as the Salute!, etc. However, NVC outreach activities require additional thought and effort to engage this particular client group to ensure they are aware of our programs.

Another gap identified was outreach to families. When a Veteran has transitioning issues, the impact can be profound on the family and its functioning. Families are often instrumental in having the Veteran seek assistance; therefore outreach to families is critical. Stakeholders noted that it is important for families to have access to clear and concise information particularly during times of crisis. Additionally, it is important that families are aware of VAC programs and services so they know how and when to contact the Department.

Staff across the country expressed frustration regarding the lack of availability of professional print material such as brochures. This print material was viewed as an important tool to assist in messaging and allow clients to share information on the Department's programs for families and others. Many of the frequently used brochures were out of print forcing staff to make copies of any remaining originals or print off brochures from VAC's website. These copies look less than professional, and require valuable time and resources to produce.

Focus group participants reinforced the importance of brochures. Many participants noted the NVC tri-fold brochure was an effective method of introducing the NVC programs. There was consensus that the information in the brochure was clear and easy to understand, and most agreed that it contained all the information required. Nearly all participants felt that it contained sufficient information to point people in the right direction in order to obtain additional information. It is clear that brochures are used as a segue to further conversations regarding the NVC.

The Department has a strategy, activities, and tools to promote NVC programs. However, it is difficult to determine the consistency and effectiveness of outreach efforts as there is little evaluation or research in this area. Following presentations there are tools available to seek participant feedback but these were being used sporadically and therefore are of limited value. Individual presenters may ask for feedback and incorporate suggestions into their future outreach activities but these suggestions were not consistently shared across the country. As described above, VAC has not

developed a performance measurement strategy for outreach nor does it track the associated costs. As a result, VAC is currently unable to measure the efficiency or effectiveness of the various outreach communication tools.

Many individuals have expressed concerns regarding VAC's Internet site with focus group participants noting difficulties finding information and a lack of detail. Overall, participants felt that general information about programs was clear and complete. However, clients seeking more detailed answers sometimes found the information available too vague. Others noted the language could be bureaucratic and difficult to understand. Regarding the completeness of information, some clients observed that VAC staff could be more proactive in volunteering information regarding programs even if not requested. This comment was also noted in feedback from advisory groups and other stakeholders. In terms of accuracy, a number of participants said they have, on occasion, received inconsistent or contradictory information from VAC Call Centre agents. Overall, problems regarding the clarity, completeness, or accuracy of information tended to be linked to specific elements of the programs, as opposed to the programs in general. Regarding proactive communication, it is interesting to note that Australia has instituted a structured approach to communicate with clients. There was a time where the Australian Veterans' Affairs was criticized for not being transparent in communicating their services and not proactively telling Veterans what is available to them to maximize their benefits. Now, the Australian Veterans' Affairs ensures all information is on their website (rules, legislation, and fact sheets) and they have a formal structure to communicate with Veterans groups. There is now a structure in place for client interactions in that it must be, frequent, open and in a manner they understand. Also when clients approach the Department, staff must inform clients regarding all of their eligibilities.

Conclusion

The Department participates in a wide range of outreach activities, most of which were initiated and supported in the district and regional offices. Transition Interviews and the functioning of IPSC's were identified as effective methods of reaching out to releasing members but there remain gaps in these activities and they do not address the outreach needs of previously released members and families. VAC messaging needs to continue to be consistent, multi-channelled and presented at multiple points in time to ensure clients avail themselves of VAC programs when appropriate. The Department would be in a better position to target messaging if more information was available on the efficiency and effectiveness of various outreach activities.

Recommendation 2 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division, in consultation with the Service Delivery Management Division and the Communications Division, plan, coordinate and target NVC messaging to ensure resources are being expended in an effective manner to reach key audiences.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

It is acknowledged that there is a need to enhance the current New Veterans Charter (NVC) Outreach Strategy (approved in 2008) to address the gaps that have been identified in awareness and understanding of the NVC programs and services, which are creating barriers to access. NVC Outreach will be a major component of an enhanced VAC Outreach, which has the following objectives: to raise awareness of services and benefits provided by VAC among key target audiences, to provide easier access to information on VAC services and benefits in language that is easy to understand, and to educate clients about how to apply and access VAC services and benefits.

Program Management Division, in conjunction with the Communications Division and the Service Delivery and Commemoration Branch will develop an enhanced VAC Outreach Strategy that will be adequately resourced to make information about VAC programs and services (in particular NVC programs and services) more client- and less program-focussed. Roles and responsibilities will be clearly outlined. The Outreach strategy will employ a multi-channelled, phased-in approach to reach our clients, with targeted activities at various times, and will focus on proactive, positive clear messaging about VAC's (with emphasis on NVC) programs and services.

The approach to external audiences will be multi-faceted, capitalizing on the existing partnership with the CF and RCMP, as well as the networks of major Veterans' organizations, and opportunities available through Commemorative and other events. It will engage VAC's senior management cadre, and target the unique outreach needs of specific client groups, including CF members, Veterans, Reservists and their families, as well as traditional Veterans and their caregivers. VAC will collaborate with DND in the development and delivery of specific messaging for each of these client groups, and in identifying out new outreach opportunities.

A performance measurement plan will be developed and outreach activities and messaging will be adjusted based on feedback and monitoring.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
2.1 Consistent with the Department's Transformation agenda and the recommendations of the Independent Assessor, Program Management Division, in conjunction with Service Delivery and Commemoration Branch, and Communications Division, will assign resources to develop the enhanced strategy, action plans for implementation, and targeted messaging for key audiences.	Program Management Division	June 2010
2.2 The 2008 NVC Outreach Strategy will be updated to address gaps in awareness and understanding that have been identified; establish a multi-faceted, phased-in approach to reach our clients; provide clear messages about VAC, in particular, NVC programs and services. This updated strategy will ensure outreach products and activities are being expended in an appropriate manner and targeted to specific audiences.	Program Management Division	December 2010
2.3 A performance measurement plan will be developed and outreach activities and messaging will be adjusted, based on feedback and monitoring.	Program Management Division	March 2011

4.2 Application Process

The NVC is intended to be a suite of programs; however, each program has a separate application to be completed by the client. A CF member or Veteran could receive an application for one or more of the NVC programs by visiting a district office, through the IPSC or Transition Interview, at the Legion, or through the National Client Contact Network (NCCN). While not all CF members or Veterans would be completing applications for all programs simultaneously, if a CF member or Veteran called the NCCN to inquire about NVC programs and services he or she could be encouraged to apply for four of the NVC programs even after a cursory screening is completed. This would result in the CF member or Veteran receiving the following forms to be completed:

- application for Disability Benefits;
- application for Rehabilitation Program and Vocational Assistance Services;
- application for Earnings Loss Benefit;
- application for Public Service Health Care Plan;
- Authority to Release Medical Service Information (Pen 860);
- multiple versions of the applicants statements if applicant is applying for more than one condition;
- Authority to Release Information – Compensation (Pen 6206);
- Quality of Life form (Pen 50) for each condition the applicant is applying for;
- a Medical Questionnaire; and
- two Authority to Release Information – Department of National Defence (VAC 634) forms.

The above listed four applications and seven forms contain multiple pages to be completed by the CF member or Veteran with limited instructions. The sheer volume of this paper work all at once would be onerous to anyone, let alone someone who may be struggling with health issues. As a result, staff report that CF members and Veterans, especially those with an Operational Stress Injury, are seeking assistance in completing the application forms. CF members were described as coming from an environment in DND where they are accustomed to being told what to do and how to do it. They expect VAC to somewhat act and treat them in the same manner that DND did.

Many CF members or Veterans who are able to complete the application forms unassisted would still prefer employee guidance. The reason is that applicants believe staff have the knowledge and experience to ensure that applications are completed properly and have a greater chance of being approved the first time. Some staff identified that they were conflicted with how much assistance they should be providing, while others indicated that they were more than willing to provide any assistance the CF member or Veteran requires. Another group of staff members felt that the intent of the NVC is to re-establish the CF member into civilian life and, therefore, CF members or Veterans should have to complete the paper work as any other civilian applying for a government program. The cause of this varied opinion from staff is that there was no guidance to field staff regarding how much assistance they should provide. There was

also the issue of work load, as helping CF members or Veterans complete applications was not part of field staff's defined responsibilities. While staff might wish to be able to help, the reality is that assisting CF members or Veterans with applications is an additional task that was not being measured or reflected in terms of achieving departmental service standards.

CF members and Veterans consider these applications so complex and time consuming that businesses have been established and are marketing their services for this purpose. These businesses advertise as being experienced with the system and able to produce more favourable results faster. It should be noted that the fees charged for these services is sizable. However, it is unknown how many CF members or Veterans are accessing these services as the department does not track the number of applicants who use the services of these businesses, nor the success rate to measure if, in fact, these applications produce more favourable results.

Clients who are able to complete the application forms on their own express frustration. From a client's perspective, there is duplication in the questions on the numerous forms and they are forced to provide basic tombstone data multiple times throughout the process. For example, when a CF member or Veteran applies for a Disability Award they are required to complete the applicant's statement (page 3 of the application for Disability Benefits). The applicant's statement requires a narrative describing how the condition is related to service, how the member/veteran has been coping with the condition, and the effect the condition has had on everyday activities. CF members and Veterans are advised to complete a separate applicant's statement for each condition and encouraged to provide as much detail as possible, further exacerbating the issue. The applicant's statement within the disability benefit application is also similar to Section F of the Rehabilitation Program and Vocational Assistance Services application. Section F asks for a narrative on how the physical and/or mental health problem results from service in the Canadian Forces and how it is creating a barrier to re-establishment to civilian life, specifically how it limits or prevents the member from performing roles in the workplace, home or community.

Additionally, much of the information CF members and Veterans are required to submit, DND already has. CF members and Veterans believe that VAC already has or should have the required service documents and medical documents from DND. Stakeholders and focus group participants expressed frustration with having to wait for requested information from DND as part of the application process.

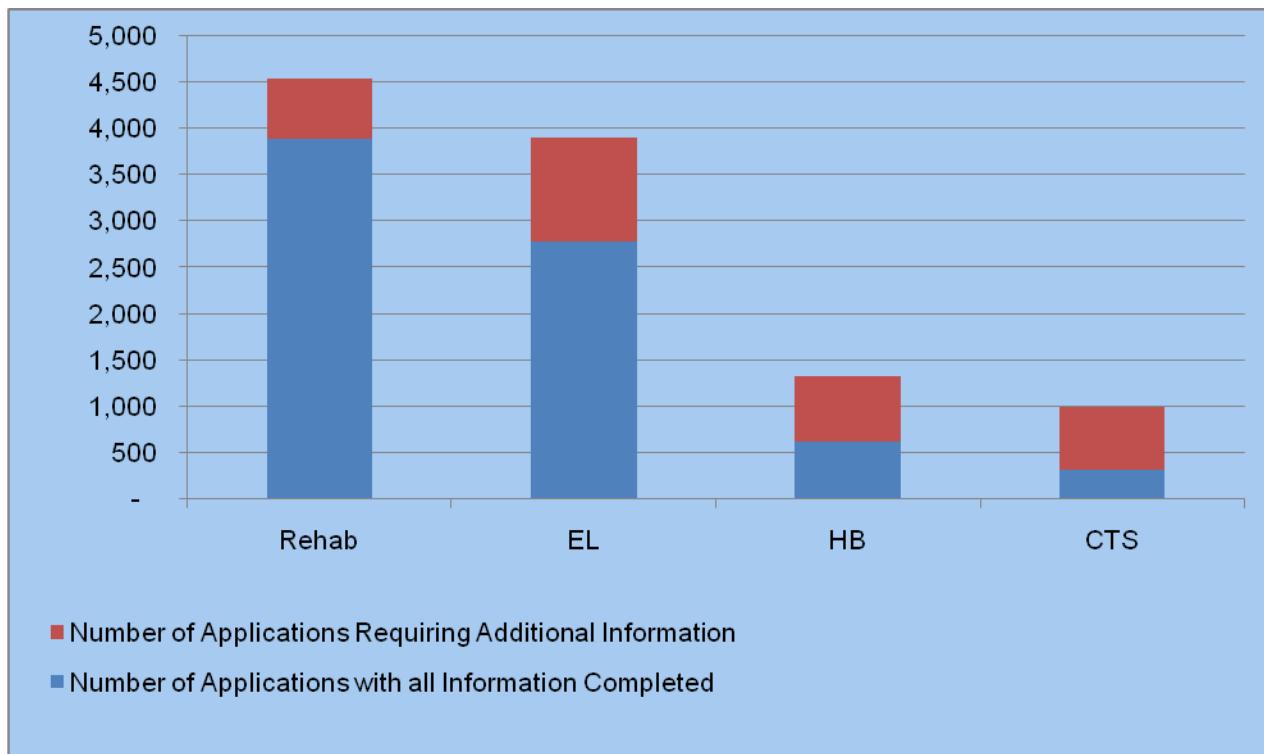
Physicians and other health professionals such as psychologists are also struggling with information required of them from the Department. They are balancing completing lengthy medical forms with an already very heavy work load. In some cities, it was identified that clients were having difficulty finding physicians and other similar types of health professionals willing to complete the forms.

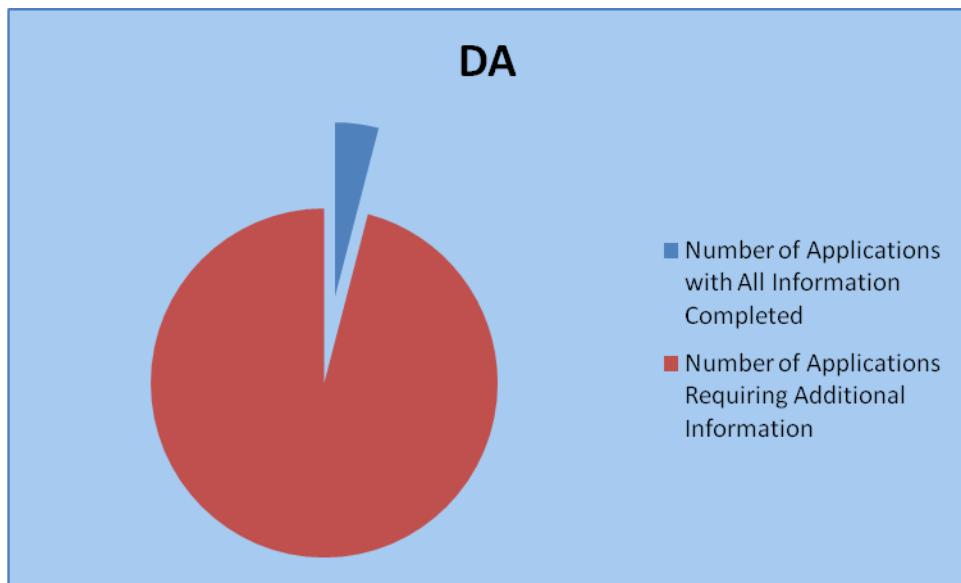
In addition to simplifying the application process, comments were also offered regarding the application forms. Stakeholders, focus group participants and staff suggested that it

would be helpful if the application forms were set up similar to those of Revenue Canada or Passport Canada, where a detailed explanation for each section is provided along with examples of what constitutes a complete answer. Specifically, it was noted that the Quality of Life form is difficult for CF members and Veterans to understand and complete.

Stakeholders and focus group participants also identified that VAC is too focused on turnaround times, which was sacrificing the quality/accuracy of decisions. From the client's perspective they are not interested in going through appeals and just want the right decision the first time. To minimize this, CF members and Veterans believe they should have a direct appointment with a case manager specifically to complete the required applications. Staff agreed that, if they participated as a regular course of business in helping CF members and Veterans, the applications would be completed in a more comprehensive fashion, turnaround times from application to the decision stage would be reduced, and fewer appeals would be launched.

The challenges and complications that clients noted above result in only 19% of NVC applications submitted actually containing all required information to process the application. The charts below illustrate the variance by program. In Annex E, detailed tables summarize the information for each program by fiscal year.





For the majority of the applications requiring additional information, the Department must return to the applicant or DND. This places additional stress on clients adds to VAC's administrative workload, and significantly extends the turnaround times for a decision. The summary table below, presents the impact of requesting additional information to process the application has on the turnaround time for a decision. Annex E also provides a summary of the types of additional information required and the turnaround time to obtain it.

Table 4.2 – APPLICATIONS BY PROGRAM					
Data for 2006-2010	DA	Rehab	EL	HB	CTS
Number of Clients Applying	33,904	4,447	3,874	1,197	996
Number of Unique applications	36,866	4,540	3,908	1,324	996
Number of Applications with all Information Completed	1,490	3,893	2,782	626	317
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	35,376	647	1,126	698	679
TAT for Decision (days)	178	39	117	59	32
Percentage Applications Approved	60.8%	93.6%	99.8%	81.2%	90.3%

VAC recently completed a review of mapping the processes associated with the Disability Benefits Program, with an aim to identifying opportunities to reduce the turnaround times. The review was undertaken as the current standard was the longest of all programs at 24 weeks and at the time, was experiencing significant back log. The results of the review then kick started a number of action plans designed to improve efficiency. However, the review was limited to the business process within VAC for Disability Benefits and did not consider the effect of applications on CF members and Veterans nor the cumulative effect of multiple applications.

Earnings Loss provides important financial support to clients while they are participating in the rehabilitation program. Financial concerns are a key part of case management and field staff highlighted the importance of providing timely access to financial support so that the clients can focus on their rehabilitation. However, the Earnings Loss application has the second longest turnaround times for a decision at an average of 117 days, although as illustrated in Annex E turnaround times for a decision have been decreasing. In addition to the complication of the forms, another key cause is that unlike the Disability Benefits and Rehabilitation Programs, district office staff are not involved in the preparation or review of applications for EL. EL applications are the responsibility of the Central Processing Centre (CPC) within Head Office. CPC staff interviewed identified that it was rare to have an application forwarded to their office that was complete and ready to be processed. The most common issue identified was that the EL application must be accompanied by a signed Authority to Release Information Department of National Defence (VAC 634) form but often times there is a signed Authority to Release Information for the Financial Benefits Program (VAC 632) attached instead. CPC staff were not aware of the origin or purpose of the VAC 632 form, and there was confusion among the NCCN and district office staff causing the wrong form to be sent to the client. Other information commonly missing included the CF Member or Veteran's social insurance number, and confirmation of income. All of these errors could easily be corrected by a review from someone in the field before sending the application to Head Office resulting in faster turnaround times and reducing administrative burden.

In the absence of a preliminary review from someone in the field, when these errors are identified the CPC prepares a letter to the CF member or Veteran detailing what is missing or incomplete in their application, and instructing them to provide the information to VAC within 30 days. This communication must be requested via mail as it is not appropriate to have the CPC staff who are unknown to the client calling to request personal information such as a Social Insurance Number over the phone. This additional correspondence causes considerable delays in the processing of EL applications. CPC staff believed it would be more effective to have the district office staff, who have already developed a rapport with the CF member or Veteran, contact them to gather missing information. However, district office staff did not feel they had the knowledge to answer questions about the EL program because they received very little training regarding this program.

Finally, with today's technology and the federal government's efforts to become more accessible and responsive, Canadians can now apply online for most government services and programs. However, the Disability Benefit Program was the only NVC program which offered an online application and significant issues with the online process were identified. The online application was only available to current VAC clients who have previously applied for, or were already in receipt of benefits from VAC, because they must have a Client ID number to proceed with the online application.

While the Disability Benefits Program application is available online, the required accompanying forms: Quality of Life, Medical Questionnaire, and Authority to Release Information – Compensation forms are not available to be submitted online. When completing applications online clients use an electronic signature for the Declaration and Authority to Release Medical/Service Information. However, the electronic signature was not recognized by the Department. Therefore, when the online applications were received by district office staff the application cannot be immediately processed. Once an online application is received the first activity to be completed is to mail out the Declaration and Authority to Release Medical/Service Information, Quality of Life, Medical Questionnaire, and Authority to Release Information – Compensation forms to be completed and signed by the client and mailed back to the district office.

Staff also reported clients experience frustration with the system because of difficulties signing into their VAC Account, system freezes, and lack of tracking abilities for their applications. Also staff were limited in the help they could provide a client when completing the online application because VAC staff cannot see what the client is viewing on his/her computer. Since April 2005 until March 2010 there have been 487 online applications for disability benefits received and the system tracks the number of clients who have attempted to use the online application. Data shows that only 66% of clients who attempted to apply online actually completed the process. Clients are indicating they would like more email contact with VAC and have more online services available.

Conclusion

The NVC is intended to be a suite of programs; however, each program has a separate application to be completed by the client. CF members and Veterans were struggling to complete the required forms, especially those with health issues requiring additional support. Staff report that if they participated with the CF Member or Veteran in the completion of the application forms, the forms would be completed to a higher standard, the process would be less of a burden on the CF member or Veteran, and turnaround times and appeals would decrease.

CF members and Veterans who were able to complete the application forms on their own expressed frustration. There is duplication in the questions on the numerous forms and applicants are required to provide basic tombstone data multiple times throughout the process. Also stakeholders and focus group participants expected that VAC would have access to this information via DND.

When the NVC programs were implemented, efforts were made to remove as many administrative tasks from the field as possible to allow for more time to concentrate on case management. While this concept was very much appreciated by field staff, experience has shown that the lack of any review before the EL application is processed at Head office causes inefficiencies and creates longer turnaround times. Also financial concerns are a key part of case management, so field staff need to be able to provide assurances regarding earnings loss benefits, to ease their concerns, allowing the CF member or Veteran to concentrate on rehabilitation.

The current online process for Disability Benefits is ineffective, incomplete and actually more cumbersome than the paper application resulting in more work for staff and longer turnaround times for applicants. When clients apply online they expect a faster and easier process and the reality is that the opposite, is occurring.

Recommendation 3 (Essential)

It is recommended that a review be conducted by the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division, in consultation with the Program Management Division and the Centralized Operations Division, to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and complication in the application process for the NVC programs.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation and will form part of the action plan to re-engineer and simplify the application process for NVC programs.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
3.1 Consult Information Management and Access to Information and Policy regarding the duplication in the collection of tombstone data to determine if any efficiencies could be gained.	Service Delivery Management Division	September 2010
3.2 Develop guidelines to assist Veterans and CF members with the completion of application forms.	Service Delivery Management Division	October 2010
3.3 A Salute article will be developed promoting the NCCN phone line for client assistance with applications.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011
3.4 Conduct a review of the application forms in the view of making them less complicated.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011

Recommendation 4 (Essential)

It is recommended that the process for applying for earnings loss be reviewed and revised by the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division in consultation with the Centralized Operations Division and Program Management Division with a view to improving efficiency.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. As a result of two recommendations by the Auditable Financial Statements on Earnings Loss, there is a plan to facilitate data exchange with Canada Revenue Agency and the Earnings Loss application business process is being revised for Survivors and Orphans to ensure that these potential clients are counselled after a death benefit ruling.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
4.1 Coordinate review with stakeholders to seek ways to simplify the EL application process.	Service Delivery Management Division	December 2010
4.2 Clarify and communicate roles of staff on the EL application process to all stakeholders.	Service Delivery Management Division	December 2010
4.3 Implement recommendations from the above review.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011

Recommendation 5 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division improve the current online application process.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The Strategic and Enabling Initiatives Directorate has created a business case and project charter/plan for improving the functionality of online client self-service. The Enhanced My VAC Account project aims to deliver an improved online self-service process while also enhancing the profile of the online service. As an increasing number of VAC clients expect to interact with the department through the internet, having appropriate self-service functionality in place to meet their needs will improve client satisfaction.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
5.1 Create Needs Analysis for My VAC Account improvements.	Service Delivery Management Division	August 2010
5.2 Design and development of My VAC Account.	Service Delivery Management Division	February 2011
5.3 Delivery of enhanced online self-service functionality.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011

4.3 Service Delivery Framework

4.3.1 Training

NVC training was delivered nationally in 2006 and was designed to provide direct client service staff with an enhanced understanding of the NVC programs. Training was developed by the NVC learning team with the objective of providing staff with as much information as was available at that time; as such, training material and information was a 'point in time' view of NVC. Staff indicated that much of the training was knowledge-based lecture style on policy and systems and since that time, they have not received any follow-up training coordinated by Head Office.

The lack of follow-up training has resulted in experienced staff not evolving with policy and process intent and, new staff feeling that they do not have a good understanding of the programs, services and benefits. This has made it necessary for field offices to develop their own training. The development and delivery of such training by district office staff directly impacts their ability to deliver client service. The regional offices were also identifying training needs and developing ad hoc training plans. The lack of nationally coordinated training and the reliance of localized developed training have created inconsistencies among districts in the amount and types of training provided to staff, which has ultimately resulted in an inefficient use of the limited training dollars and field resources.

In August 2009, a National SDC learning plan proposal was developed but, has never been implemented; therefore, a current national training plan does not exist, which could potentially identify and address training gaps. In the absence of a national training plan regions and district offices have developed their own training and planning initiatives such as mentoring and peer-to-peer support, while other offices are using local service providers, OSI clinics or Ste. Anne's Hospital for informal but effective training. Front-line staff identified the need for ongoing skills-based training in the areas of case planning, disengagement and motivational interviewing in order to successfully case manage NVC clients

Conclusion

Initial training at implementation provided a “point-in-time” view of the NVC but there has not been any coordinated follow-up training on a national level to ensure staff are evolving with policy and process intent and that new staff have a good understanding of the programs, services and benefits. Most training provided has been lecture style or relying on peer-to-peer support and staff have identified a need for more skills based training.

The absence of nationally coordinated training has resulted in inconsistencies among districts in the amount and types of training provided to staff. It is also unknown if existing or new staff are developing the skills required to deliver quality service consistently across the country. Ultimately this results in an inefficient use of training dollars and field resources.

Recommendation 6 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division in consultation with the Program Management Division, develop, resource and sustain a National Learning Program for the New Veterans Charter.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation however management views this as a strategic priority and not a program. Service Delivery Management Division is committed to provide a national training plan to provide support to delivery of programs and services to clients and also to establish standards for training and determine needs.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
6.1 Develop a National Learning Strategy to identify the resources required to develop and sustain this program.	Service Delivery Management Division	November 2010
6.2 Conduct a learning needs assessment.	Service Delivery Management Division	February 2011
6.3 Implement a National Learning Strategy.	Service Delivery Management Division	April 2011

4.3.2 Tools

Client demographics at VAC have changed dramatically in recent years such that the number of VAC's traditional war service clients is tapering off and the number of modern day CF Veterans is increasing. As of March 2010, the total estimated Canadian Forces Veteran population was 593,700 with 155,700 war service Veterans.

These modern day Veterans have different requirements, challenges and expectations compared to the traditional clientele. This change in client base has resulted in the need for case managers to juggle a variety of client needs and expectations. To support this change there are a variety of tools at the disposal of front-line staff to assist in the delivery of services. These tools encompass numerous systems, policies, and business processes.

Field staff reported the greatest frustration and hindrance to service delivery was the difficulty they experience trying to access VAC policies, business processes and directives. It was identified that while staff were generally aware of relevant policies, business processes, and directives, because of frequent changes they often were not sure if they had the most current version. Staff felt changes to policies, business processes and directives were not being communicated in a coordinated manner. For example, staff indicated that a new or revised policy would be sent via e-mail but the applicable business processes would not be included. This causes confusion for staff, particularly since some front-line staff indicated that they follow the business processes to the letter. Staff suggested that VAC needed a more coordinated approach for communicating changes to policy and business processes.

The Veterans Services Support Network (VSSN) Intranet site was developed to provide consistent and timely policy and operational guidance for staff. The VSSN was to link front-line staff working in district offices, regional management centres and centres of expertise with established points of contact from the two Management Centres in Charlottetown - Program and Service Policy Division and National Operations Division. Under the 2009 organizational realignment, Service Delivery Management emerged as the single point of contact at Head Office for regional, district and operational staff. This single point of contact was to replace VSSN and allow for more efficient and effective advice and direction to the field. However, even though VSSN was no longer being updated it was still available online and many staff were still relying upon VSSN for guidance. This creates situations where staff are using information which is no longer up-to-date nor accurate.

The VAC Intranet site is the main source of information for field staff seeking information on programs, policies, or business processes. Given the volume of this information it can be difficult to find the information required which is why a search engine was created. However, staff raised concern with the effectiveness of this search engine as it does not clearly display the required information. For example, information provided via the search engine was not presented in order of relevance such as legislation, policy, business process or with any revisions highlighted. Staff expressed a lack of

confidence in the information provided via the search engine as they often encounter outdated or incomplete information. This was causing them to spend excessive amount of time searching for the information they require to conduct their work.

Due to the time required to locate required documents, staff are creating their own reference material and sharing this information with others. This reference material, which may not be accurate nor approved, is being used to support service delivery decisions. This reference material reduces the consistency of client service and could result in the wrong decisions being made.

Conclusion

VAC's programs and services are delivered by front-line staff in district offices across the country. Field staff reported that they are spending excessive amounts of time searching for information they require to conduct their work. This additional searching causes an administrative burden and negatively impacts direct client service. In the absence of easily accessible tools such as policy and operational guidance, staff are creating and sharing their own reference material which may not be accurate. The current system which provides staff with policies, directives and guidance in support of program and service delivery is inefficient. The changes to policies, business processes and directives are not communicated in a coordinated manner and staff are feeling challenged to meet the emerging needs of our clientele with the tools and resources presently available to them.

Recommendation 7 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division develop and implement a process to streamline access to current policies, business processes and directives and more effectively identify and communicate changes.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation and the process to streamline access to policies, business processes and directives will be part of the Departmental transformation agenda. Service Delivery Management is the single point of contact for the dissemination of policies, businesses processes and directives to staff.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
7.1 The new process for the Single Point of Contact is being further developed to ensure effective communication and dissemination of access to policies, business process and directives.	Service Delivery Management Division	September 2010
7.2 A review of VSSN will be conducted to determine its functionality and potential improvements or removal.	Service Delivery Management Division	December 2010
7.3 Place all policies, business processes and directives on-line through the Departmental WIKI when available.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011

4.3.3 Functional Direction

Functional direction provides operational staff with guidance on policy and process to support decision making. This functional direction comes in various forms from the district, regional and Head Office levels of the department. Head Office personnel, comprising of both health professionals and functional specialists, support the development of program policies and processes as well as set precedents on non-routine cases. Regional and district personnel, also comprising of both health professionals and functional specialists, provide input into policies and processes and assist operational staff on complex cases.

Prior to NVC, Health Care Team (HCT) rendered certain decisions regarding treatment and services for clients. HCT is comprised of case management, nursing, medical representatives and the manager of client services as part of an overall client-centred service approach to service delivery.

With the implementation of the NVC, two new positions, a rehabilitation officer and a mental health officer, were created and staffed at both the regional and national level. The purpose of these positions was to provide functional direction to front-line staff and to play a key role in the delivery of intense and complex case management services to clients and families through an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) composed of health professionals and case managers. The terms of reference for the IDT have not been clearly articulated in policy nor business process. Therefore, the composition and use of IDTs were not consistent across the country. In some areas, the IDTs were meeting twice a week and some were meeting every two weeks. Some client service teams were adding IDT to the end of their HCT, while other client service teams were doing IDT via email.

The standard of practice for rehabilitation case management includes extensive use of an IDT to ensure a collaborative approach to a well developed rehabilitation plan, resulting in better client outcomes. The lack of consistent use of the IDT and lack of individual consultation with health professionals among case managers in VAC offices leads to wide variations in quality, timeliness and effectiveness of services to clients, ultimately impacting client outcomes.

Within IDTs and HCTs there are numerous functional specialists and health professionals: District Nursing Officers (DNOs), District Medical Officers (DMOs), contract Occupational Therapists (OTs), Regional Rehabilitation Officers (RROs), Regional Mental Health Officers (RMHOs) and Standards Training and Evaluation Officers (STEOs). In some client service teams, these positions were being used collaboratively to ensure quality of service, desired client outcomes and improved case management. However, the collaboration and consultation was not consistent across client service teams. There was also confusion and a lack of guidance regarding who was a functional specialist and when these professionals should be consulted in relation to NVC clients.

Front-line staff spoke positively of the guidance and direction provided by the RRO and RMHO; however, in some areas staff commented timely access was an issue. Individuals in these positions were providing guidance to an entire region, therefore, the response time might not be as immediate as required. Also in some regions these positions had a high turnover in staff, resulting in less continuity of service and direction provided to front-line staff.

Staff were not clear of the role of the DNO and DMO and contract OTs in relation to NVC. Staff stated that their preferred option was to use local resources first, then consult with the regional functional specialist as necessary; however, business processes were inconsistent on this approach. Staff suggested that greater utilization of the DNO, DMO and contract OT could provide them with more local resources and reduce the burden of the RRO and RMHO.

Staff identified that there is lack of clarity with the role of various Head Office personnel and difficulties getting the information that they needed in a timely manner. However, it should be noted that at the time of fieldwork head Office had recently realigned and responsibilities were still in the process of being determined and communicated.

While there was guidance regarding when various functional specialists and health professionals should be engaged, indicators for referral were not easily accessible on the internal website and many staff were not using them, and others were not even aware of such indicators for referral. There was also some role confusion among the health professionals and functional specialists. There were some who wanted to be consulted and were not; while there were others who were being consulted and do not see case planning of NVC clients as being their role.

Conclusion

Collaboration allows for individuals working together and examining new perspectives. Collaboration also invites input from varying perspectives, thus, improving the quality of service and outcomes leading to improved case management. Staff were not clear on processes and guidelines with respect to consultation with functional specialists and health professionals. There was even confusion in which positions are functional specialists for the NVC. Business processes and policy were not clear on the definition, purpose, composition and usage of the IDT. Clarification of the IDT and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities of health professionals and functional specialists would stimulate collaboration and improve the quality of service and outcomes for a client.

Functional direction comes in different forms from the district, region and Head Office levels of the Department. Front-line staff report they do not have sufficient access to functional direction to get the guidance and direction they require on a timely basis. Greater utilization of the DNO, DMO and contract OT could provide staff with more local resources to provide more timely support and help reduce the burden of the RRO and RMHO.

Recommendation 8 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division clarify and communicate the purpose and composition for the interdisciplinary team.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation and is linked to Recommendation #9.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
8.1 Communicate the present purpose and composition of the IDT.	Service Delivery Management Division	September 2010
8.2 Clarify and communicate the role of the IDT in relation to the future role of Health Professionals and Functional Specialists following the decision taken of the Health Professional Review.	Service Delivery Management Division	March 2011

Recommendation 9 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Service Delivery Management Division, clarify the role of health professionals and functional specialists in relation to the NVC programs and to each other and more effectively communicate when to consult with these positions.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
9.1 A review of the Role of the Health Professionals commenced in June 2010.	Service Delivery Management Division	August 2010
9.2 The key findings and recommendations will be presented to Director General Policy and Program Review Committee and then to Senior Management Committee for approval and decisions.	Service Delivery Management Division	October 2010
9.3 Implementation and times lines will be determined for the approved recommendations.	Service Delivery Management Division	December 2010

4.3.4 Delegated Authority

The authority to approve eligibility, to establish entitlement and to approve payments is exercised in accordance with the delegation from the Minister by means of an Instrument of Delegation, and the Delegation of Financial Signing Authorities Chart for VAC, to positions at the appropriate organizational levels where these responsibilities can be most efficiently and effectively exercised and where accountability for results can best be established. For most NVC programs, the delegated authority rests with Head Office (e.g., Disability Award Program or Financial Benefits Program). For the Rehabilitation program, the majority of approval authority rests with field staff.

For medical and/or psychosocial rehabilitative services, case managers have the authority to approve any services defined on VAC's benefit grid. This benefit grid defines the types of services, frequency and dollar limit which field staff can approve. Any rehabilitative services not on the grid or which exceed the 20% dollar threshold must be approved by Head Office. In these situations the case manager, in consultation with the IDT prepares a strong rationale and/or compelling evidence/information to support why a particular medical and/or psychosocial rehabilitation service or benefit is required in this unique situation to meet the client's needs. The case is then forwarded to the RRO with the supporting documentation. Following the RRO review, the case is then submitted to Head Office for approval. The result is a cumbersome and involved decision making process causing delays for the client.

One issue identified by staff was that the guidelines within the Benefit Grid were not reflective of the needs of rehabilitating clients. It was described that clients with rehabilitation needs are working towards restoring function which in many cases requires services not currently identified on the benefit grid (e.g. life skills) or services that continually exceed the limits contained on the benefit grid. Therefore, there are numerous requests being forwarded to Head Office for approval. Before these requests are sent to Head Office they have already been reviewed and recommended by both the IDT and the RRO and in many cases similar requests, are routinely being approved. As a result, field staff felt that too many routine decisions were being routed to Head Office for approval which causes unnecessary delays without adding value to the decision making process.

This observation is supported in the Programs of Choice Analysis Audit dated June 2009. According to that audit, from May to December 2008 there were 745 decisions relating to the treatment benefits program rendered by Head Office with 96% approved. The audit identified the need for the development of new policy guidelines for dealing with requests for benefits and services which are not contained on the Benefit Grids, or exceed the benefit grid, which would allow for greater empowerment of front-line staff and would improve client service. The audit recommended that VAC determine how changes to business processes could be implemented to reduce the volume of cases adjudicated by Head Office and to assign resources to conduct regular reviews and

edits to the Benefit Grids. Currently there is work being undertaken but at this point in time, the recommendation remains outstanding.

In an effort to address this issue, VAC management is working to phase in the transfer of a significant level of delegated authority and decision making for the rehabilitation program to the district office level. During fieldwork, these revisions were being tested in one of VAC's district offices. Field staff interviewed from the test site felt positive about the delegation changes as they empowered staff and allowed for faster decisions resulting in improved service to clients. However, there was not a strong quality assurance process in place nor was a formal evaluation planned to determine if the revised authorities were actually working better or simply allowing for faster decisions.

In anticipation of changes to the delegated authorities, it is imperative that a proper quality assurance function be established. Over the past decade VAC has been making significant changes to its client service delivery model and enhancing its programs in order to better respond to the diverse range of disability and health needs which are experienced by VAC clients. The cumulative effect of the foregoing service enhancements, and legislative and program changes results in increased demands for field staff. A formal quality assurance process would ensure that the decision making process is evidence based, applied consistently across the country, and is reflective of client service objectives.

In the area of vocational services, the delegated authority has been defined in the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Regulations*. Specifically, Section 15.1 of the regulations prescribes in detail the services and costs which field staff have the authority to approve. Any expenses that are not detailed within Section 15.1, or exceed the rates as prescribed follow a similar path as described above to be approved. The issue identified with vocational services is that the rates have not been updated since the NVC was introduced in 2006 and cover very specific costs. For example, supplies and internet fees are included as part of section 15.1 but the purchase of a computer is not specifically spelled out. The lack of interpretation of acceptable costs in Section 15.1 results in a significant number of vocational services decisions being directed to Head Office approval. However, it should be noted that because these expenses are defined in legislation, unlike the medical and/or psychosocial service in the benefit grid, any potential updates or changes would require a Treasury Board submission.

Conclusion

Appropriate delegation of authority empowers field staff to effectively case manage clients. However, the current process for approving services is not efficient as it is taking too long for routine decisions, impacting on the client and the relationship the case manager has with the client.

VAC is currently revising the delegated authorities to allow for more timely decision making. To successfully implement any revised authority case managers need to be

supported with training, have access to up-to-date policies and business processes, and receive sufficient support from functional specialists. However, as described in Sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.3 these areas require improvement. In addition, developing a strong quality assurance process is necessary to ensure that any future revisions to improve efficiency does not come at the cost of reducing the quality and consistency of decision making.

Another issue identified, is that the guidelines within the Benefit Grid were not reflective of the needs of rehabilitating clients. The Programs of Choice Analysis Audit identified the need for the development of new policy guidelines for dealing with requests for benefits and services which are not contained on the Benefit Grids, or exceed the benefit grid, which would allow for greater empowerment of front-line staff and would improve client service. Currently there is work being undertaken to address the recommendations from the Programs of Choice Audit.

Recommendation 10 (Essential)

It is recommended that the Director General, Program Management Division in consultation with Service Delivery Management Division, Policy Division and Finance Division complete the modifications to the delegation of authority for the New Veterans Charter and implement the revised authority with a supportive framework which includes a comprehensive quality assurance component.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The Director General, Program Management Division in consultation with Service Delivery Management Division, Policy Division and Finance Division have completed the modifications to the delegation of authority for the New Veterans Charter, and an accompanying supportive framework, which includes a comprehensive quality assurance component. Implementation is targetted for October 2010.

This is similar to the "Rehab 2" recommendation of the Audited Financial Statements. This is being actioned, as per the enclosed Management Action Plan.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action(s) to be taken	OPI (Office of Primary Interest)	Target Date
10.1 Guidelines/Directives development (Sect. 15(1) and 15(3) of NVC Regulations)	Program Management Division	Completed
10.2 Robust Quality Assurance and Performance Monitoring Process	Program Management Division	October 2010
10.3 Promulgation of Policy	NVC Policy Directorate	Completed
10.4 Obtain Minister Delegation required for Sect. 15(3)	Finance Division	Completed
10.5 Implementation	Service Delivery Management Division	October 2010
10.6 Monitoring	Service Delivery Management Division / Program Management Division	On-going

5.0 DISTRIBUTION

Deputy Minister
Chief of Staff to the Minister
Chair, Veterans Review and Appeal Board
Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Programs and Partnerships Branch
Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery and Commemoration Branch
Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services Branch
Executive Director and Chief Pensions Advocate, BPA
Director General, Program Management Division
Director General, Service Delivery Management Division
Director General, Policy and Research Division
Director General, Centralized Operations Division
Director General, Communications Division
Director General, Finance Division
Director General, Departmental Secretariat and Policy Coordination
Director General, Human Resources Division
Regional Directors General (3)
District Directors (29)
Director, Strategic and Enabling Initiatives
Director, Operational Direction and Guidance
Director, Rehabilitation
Director, Disability Programs and Income Support
Director, Strategic Policy
Director, Program Policy
Director, Mental Health
Director, Benefit Operations
Director, Resource Management
Director, Client Advice and Planning
District Director, Halifax District
District Director, Montreal District
District Director, Hamilton District
Regional Director Client Services, Western Region
Manager, Knowledge Management
Project Officer, Knowledge Management
Deputy Coordinator, Access to Information & Privacy
Program Analyst, Treasury Board of Canada, Secretariat (TBS)
Comptrollership Branch (TBS)

LISTING OF ACRONYMS

CF	-	Canadian Forces
CPC	-	Central Processing Centre
DND	-	Department of National Defence
DNO	-	District Nursing Officer
DMO	-	District Medical Officer
EL	-	Earnings Loss
HCT	-	Health Care Team
IDT	-	Interdisciplinary team
IPSC	-	Integrated Personnel Support Centre
NCCN	-	National Contract Centre Network
NVC	-	New Veterans Charter
OT	-	Occupational Therapist
PPP	-	Programs, Policy and Partnerships
RMHO	-	Regional Mental Health Officer
RRO	-	Regional Rehabilitation Officer
SDC	-	Service Delivery and Commemoration
STEO	-	Standards Training and Evaluation Officer
VAC	-	Veterans Affairs Canada

ANNEX A - SIGNIFICANCE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To assist management in determining the impact of the observations, the following definitions are used to classify recommendations presented in this report.

- Critical:** Relates to one or more significant weaknesses/gaps. These weaknesses/gaps could impact on the achievement of goals at the Departmental level.
- Essential:** Relates to one or more significant weaknesses/gaps. These weaknesses/gaps could impact on the achievement of goals at the Branch/Program level.
- Important:** Relates to one or more significant weaknesses/gaps. These weaknesses/gaps could impact on the achievement of goals at the Sub-Program level.

ANNEX B – SUMMARY OF NVC PROGRAMS

The following tables provide a brief summary of each of the NVC programs. Please note that these tables do not provide an exhaustive list of all service and benefits available under each program.

Disability Awards Program

Program Description	Services and Benefits	Delivery Method
Disability Awards is a lump-sum payment designed to recognize and compensate for the non-economic impacts of a service-related disability.	A tax-free lump-sum payment, based on the Veteran's assessed disability resulting from service.	VAC
Death Benefit recognizes and compensates eligible survivors and dependents for the non-economic impacts of a service-related death.	A tax-free lump-sum payment issued to an eligible survivor or dependent for a service related death.	VAC
Detention Benefit recognizes and compensates a member for the non-economic impacts arising from the time of detainment.	A tax-free lump-sum payment based on the number of days the client was detained.	VAC
Clothing Allowance accounts for wear and tear of clothing or the need for custom made apparel related to those disabilities compensated by a disability award.	The clothing allowance is paid as a monthly benefit.	VAC
Financial Counselling reimburses qualifying clients for some or all of the cost of financial advice related to managing their lump-sum award.	If the award is more than 5%, VAC will reimburse clients up to \$500.	External Financial Advisors

Rehabilitation Program

Program Description	Services and Benefits	Delivery Method
<p>Medical Rehabilitation is designed to stabilize client functioning, reduce symptoms and restore basic physical and psychological functioning to the extent possible.</p>	<p>Services that may be provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychiatric treatment; • Prosthetics and aids; • Massage therapy; • Occupational therapy; • Medications; • etc. 	External health professionals reimbursed for service
<p>Psycho Social Rehabilitation is designed to restore independent functioning and promote adaptation to permanent disabilities that impact on daily activities at home and in the community.</p>	<p>Services that may be provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills; • Psychological counselling; • Physiotherapy; • Family or couples counselling; • etc. 	External health professionals reimbursed for service
<p>Vocational Rehabilitation is designed to identify and achieve an appropriate occupational goal for a person with a physical or a mental health problem, given their state of health and the extent of their education, skills and experience.</p>	<p>Services that may be provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational evaluations/ counselling; • Education/training; • Child care; • Work place ergonomic assessment and modification; • Job finding/placement services; • etc. 	National Contractor
<p>Vocational Assistance applies to the medically released CF and/or spouses of eligible Veterans or survivors of deceased Regular Force Veterans or Members. It is a more streamlined process for persons who do not have a disability. The goal is to find suitable employment. A plan is developed and is based on the person's previous education, skills and experiences.</p>	<p>Services that may be provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability assessments; • Career counselling; • Training; • Job-search assistance; • Job-finding assistance; • etc. 	National contractor

Financial Benefits Program

Program Description	Services and Benefits	Delivery Method
<p>Earnings Loss Benefit is a benefit designed to provide financial compensation in recognition of the economic impact that a service related or career ending injury has on a Veteran's earnings capacity following release.</p>	<p>Temporary Earnings Loss is a monthly benefit payable while the Veteran is actively participating in rehabilitation.</p> <p>Extended Earnings Loss is a monthly benefit payable to age 65 if the Veteran is unable to perform any occupation that would be considered suitable gainful employment.</p> <p>Benefit may be payable to survivors or orphans.</p> <p>Benefits based on 75% of gross pre-release income or deemed income.</p>	VAC
<p>Permanent Impairment Allowance is a benefit designed to recognize the impact that a service related severe permanent impairment has on employment potential and career advancement potential.</p>	<p>Monthly benefit paid in addition to the earnings loss benefit. There are three grades based on extent of severity of the Permanent Impairment Allowance.</p>	VAC
<p>Supplementary Retirement Benefit is a benefit designed to compensate for the lost opportunity to contribute to a retirement pension due to career ending or service-related disability.</p>	<p>Lump-sum benefit payable to Veterans in receipt of an Extended Earnings Loss Benefit who have reached the age of 65 or prior to age 65, if the Veteran is no longer considered to be "totally and permanently incapacitated". Benefits are 2% of gross earnings loss benefit and payable before other income is considered.</p> <p>Benefit may also be payable to survivors.</p>	VAC
<p>CF Income Support is a benefit designed to provide a soft landing for Veterans that have successfully completed the rehabilitation program, and are capable of returning to 'suitable gainful employment' but have not been successful in obtaining such employment.</p>	<p>Clients are income tested against total household income.</p> <p>Monthly benefit which is not offset by VAC Disability Awards.</p>	VAC

Health Benefits Program

Program Description	Services and Benefits	Delivery Method
Eligible CF Veterans are offered the opportunity to purchase lifetime, post-release health coverage for themselves and their families through the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP).	<p><i>Supplementary coverage</i> augments benefits provided under the provincial/territorial plan in the member's province/territory of residence.</p> <p><i>Comprehensive coverage</i> provides benefits for those residing outside Canada who are not covered by a provincial/territorial health insurance plan.</p>	PSHCP

Career Transition Services (formerly the Job Placement Program)

Program Description	Services and Benefits	Delivery Method
Eligible CF Veterans not requiring rehabilitation are offered Career Transition Services to support them in finding civilian employment.	<p>Workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • résumé writing, interview, and job search techniques • market research for job search and self-marketing • identification of transferable skills and civilian career management • mock interviews <p>Individual Counseling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aptitude testing and interest inventory • skills and experience assessment • finalization of resume • assessment of job market and identification of further training requirements. <p>Job-finding assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching to career transition including assistance obtaining interviews • provide information on job vacancies 	National Contractor

ANNEX C – INTERVIEWS

	Locations	Division/Position	Interviews
Head Office	Charlottetown	Central Processing Centre CF Initiatives, Communications Division, Mental Health Programs, Program Management Division, Policy Division, Service Delivery Division	56
Regional Offices	Dartmouth (Atlantic Region) Kirkland Lake (Ontario Region) Montreal (Quebec Region) Vancouver (Western Region) Winnipeg (Western Region)	National Client Contact Centre, Regional Director Client Services, Regional Director General, Regional Medical Officer, Regional Mental Health Officer, Regional Nursing Officer, Regional Pension Coordinator, Regional Rehabilitation Officer, Standards Training and Evaluation Officer,	17
District Offices	Brandon, Charlottetown, Cold Lake, Edmonton, Halifax, Pembroke, Quebec City, Saskatoon, Thunder Bay, Victoria, Windsor	Area Counselor, Client Service Team Manager, Client Service Agent, District Director, District Medical Officer, District Nursing Officer, Occupational Therapist, Pension Assistant , Pension Officer	58
Integrated Personnel Support Centres	Halifax, Edmonton, Quebec City, Pembroke	Area Counselor, Client Service Team Manager, Client Service Agent, Pension Assistant , Pension Officer	18
Canadian Forces	Halifax, Edmonton, Quebec City	Case Manager, Area Personnel Selection Officer, Military Family Resource Centre	8
OSISS	Charlottetown, Edmonton Halifax, Quebec City	Peer Support, Family Support	8
		Total	165

The following selection criteria were used to determine sites included in the evaluation:

- A mix of offices close to a CF base serving a large population of NVC clients, offices close to a CF base and relatively isolated, offices not close to a base and serving a relatively smaller population of NVC clients.
- Representation from Army, Navy, Air force as well as Reserve Force.
- Offices which included the new Integrated Personnel Support Centres.
- National representation.
- Sites where focus groups were conducted.
- Proportional coverage of the client population.

ANNEX D – ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON OUTREACH

Additional outreach opportunities suggested by staff during interviews:

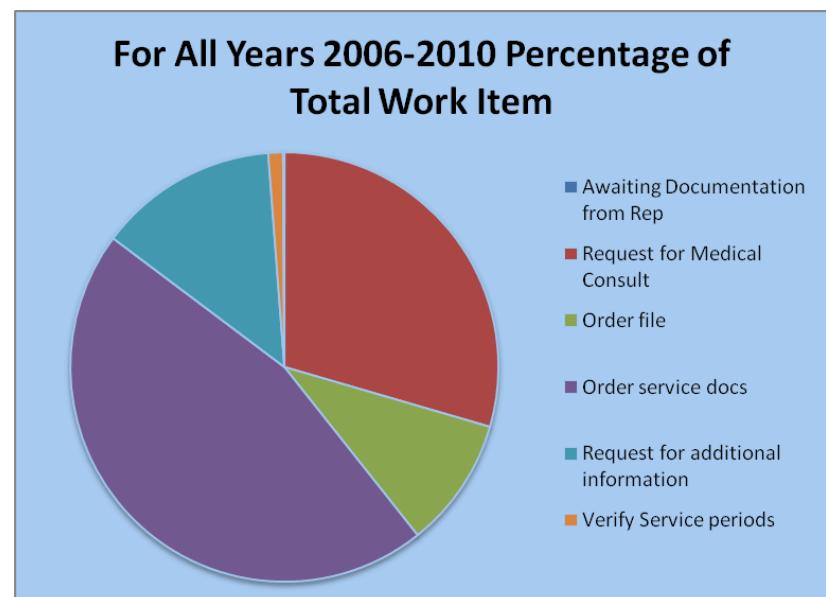
Venue	Description	Target
Community	Provide information sessions and print material to community service providers and partners on NVC services and benefits. This includes a wide range of community organizations including but not limited to;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal groups • Community mental health • Welfare offices • Chaplains • Shelters, • Transition facilities
Health Partners	Provide information and print material to a wide range of health professionals including but not limited to;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health professionals, clinics, hospitals, emergency rooms and professional health associations • Physicians and particularly family physicians • Children's Aid Society and other children's services supports
Orientation Sessions for VAC Health contractors	Provide an overview of the department and NVC services and benefits to all service providers contracted by the department. Clients do not always understand that these are not VAC employees and ask them a wide range of questions on services. At minimum providers should understand how to refer individuals back to the department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All VAC Health Contractors • Example fee for service providers
Media	Sponsor commercials and print advertising in a variety of sources to reach previously released CF members who may not be aware of the NVC programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio • Ads in local papers • TV spots similar to Canadian Heritage Moments • local cable • FaceBook • Provide client Email ability • Messaging to related WEB groups • Create WEB based tracking tools for clients • Electronic message boards • All NVC applications available on line

Venue	Description	Target
DND	Provide information to and liaise with various areas within DND including but not limited to;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DND senior levels • CF members at the beginning of their career • Still serving in permanent category • Insert print material in DND's pension cheques • Page in CF deployment family member resource book • Military police • DND public Affairs • Wing Chiefs Coffee Hour • Brigade paper • DND promotion courses presentation • Canadian Field Hospitals
General Community	Provide easy to read general information with clear contact information in a variety of public places such as;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gym bulletin boards • Service Canada Locations • Bus stops • Coffee shops • Recreation centres • MP's offices • Shopping mall bulletin boards • Senators Offices • Senior citizens community centres • Health fairs
Journals and other professional publications	Publish advertisements and/or submit articles to;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Family Physician Magazine • DND Journal

ANNEX E – APPLICATION SUMMARY TABLES

DISABILITY AWARD SUMMARY

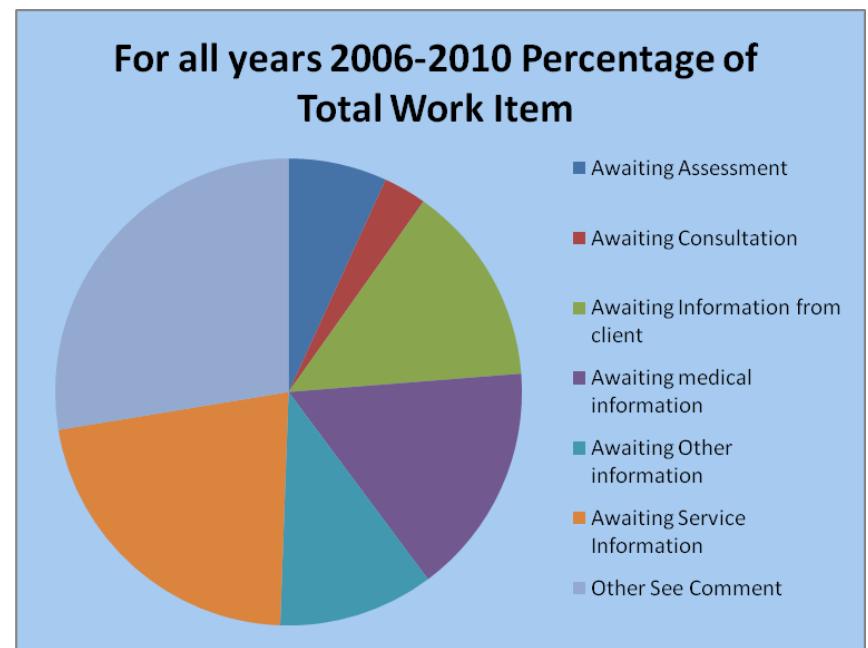
	DA for all years 2006-	For 2006-2007	For 2007-2008	For 2008-2009	For 2009-2010
Number of Clients Applying	33,904	4,937	8,249	9,402	11,316
Number of Unique Applications	36,866	5,273	9,080	10,287	12,226
Number of Applications with All Information Completed	1,490	249	474	405	362
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	35,376	5,024	8,606	9,882	11,864
TAT for Decision (days)	178	122	171	167	217
Percentage Applications Approved	60.8%	47.8%	59.3%	63.1%	65.4%



		For All Years 2006-2010		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
Work Item Categories		Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)
	Awaiting Documentation from Rep	0%	24	0%	0	0%	0	0%	30	0%	73
	Request for Medical Consult	29%	36	28%	38	29%	42	30%	40	30%	29
	Order file	10%	14	10%	15	9%	16	10%	13	10%	12
	Order service docs	46%	35	47%	29	45%	37	46%	30	46%	41
	Request for additional information	14%	26	14%	19	14%	25	14%	25	13%	31
	Verify Service periods	1%	14	2%	16	3%	13	0%	15	0%	11
	Awaiting allied ruling	0%	187	0%	0	0%	0	0%	187	0%	0
	Request legal consult	0%	9	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	9
	Request Policy direction	0%	55	0%	26	0%	56	0%	84	0%	41
	Verify Release Date	0%	11	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	0%	13
	Awaiting Service Information	0%	8	0%	0	0%	17	0%	7	0%	7

REHABILITATION SUMMARY

	Rehab for All Years 2006- 2010	For 2006- 2007	For 2007- 2008	For 2008- 2009	For 2009- 2010
Number of Clients Applying	4,447	1,411	932	1,049	1,055
Number of Unique Applications	4,540	1,424	954	1,071	1,091
Number of Applications with All Information Completed	3,893	1,412	760	831	890
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	647	12	194	240	201
TAT for Decision (days)	39	43	44	42	29
Percentage Applications Approved	93.6%	91.6%	92.7%	95.1%	95.7%

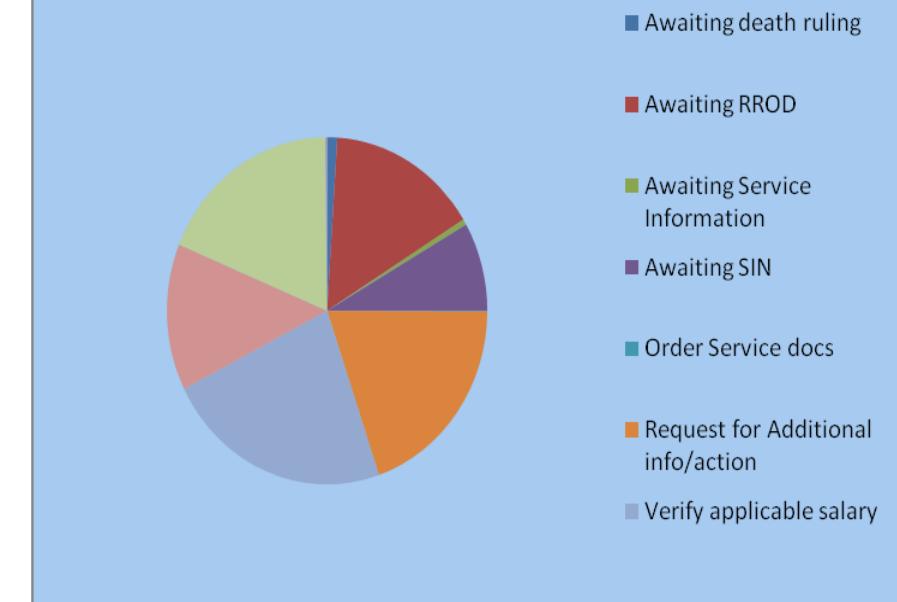


		For all years 2006-2010		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
Work Item Categories		Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)
	Awaiting Assessment	7%	34	0%	0	3%	20	10%	39	6%	30
	Awaiting Consultation	3%	11	0%	0	1%	13	4%	13	3%	8
	Awaiting Information from client	14%	25	6%	283	17%	23	15%	20	11%	29
	Awaiting medical information	16%	42	24%	71	15%	67	12%	37	21%	28
	Awaiting Other information	11%	37	18%	211	10%	32	14%	35	7%	27
	Awaiting Service Information	22%	17	12%	21	12%	10	24%	21	29%	16
	Other See Comment	28%	16	41.18%	6	40%	9	21%	27	23%	14

EARNINGS LOSS SUMMARY

	EL for All Years 2006-2010	For 2006-2007	For 2007-2008	For 2008-2009	For 2009-2010
Number of Clients Applying	3,874	1,186	849	929	910
Number of Unique Applications	3,908	1,186	856	939	927
Number of Applications with All Information Completed	1,259	1,068	57	63	71
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	2,649	118	799	876	856
TAT for Decision (days)	117	209	86	89	58
Percentage Applications Approved	99.8%	99.8%	99.8%	99.8%	100.0%

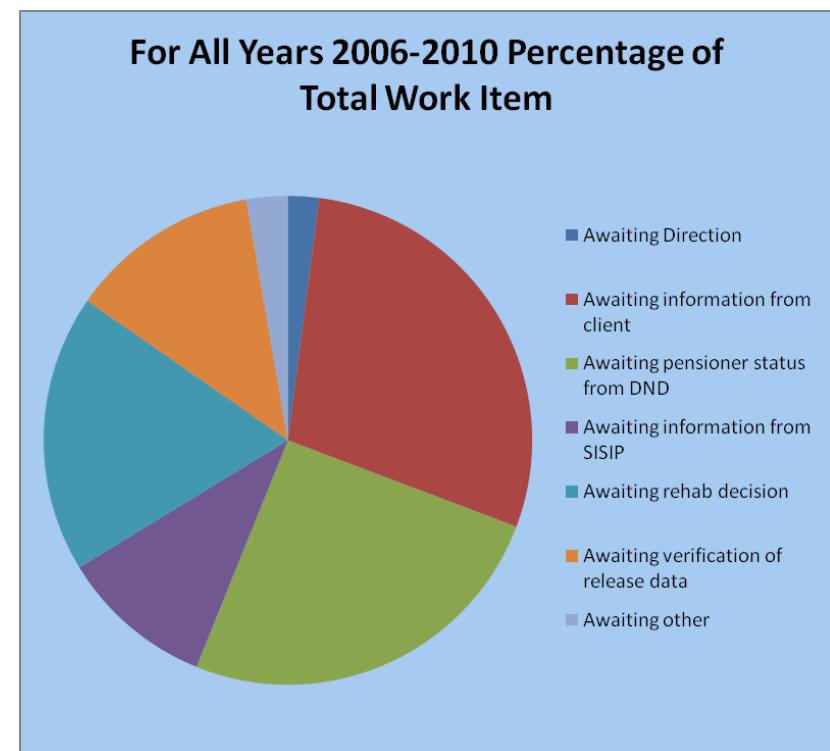
For All Years 2006-2010 Percentage of Total Work Item



		For All Years 2006-2010		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
Work Item categories		Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)
	Awaiting death ruling	1%	106	0%	-	0%	25	2%	153	1%	57
	Awaiting RROD	15%	67	3%	288	17%	70	15%	76	14%	49
	Awaiting Service Information	1%	36	0%	42	1%	41	1%	38	0%	13
	Awaiting SIN	8%	43	2%	185	7%	39	10%	45	8%	39
	Order Service docs	0%	38	0%	-	0%	-	0%	50	0%	20
	Request for Additional info/action	20%	91	47%	224	20%	92	22%	89	15%	57
	Verify applicable salary	23%	43	17%	199	23%	38	20%	49	26%	33
	Verify Income Sources	14%	63	18%	263	13%	57	13%	74	15%	38
	Verify release date	19%	37	12%	209	19%	30	18%	44	20%	28
Verify Service periods		0%	18	0%	-	0%	-	0%	5	0%	22

HEALTH BENEFITS SUMMARY

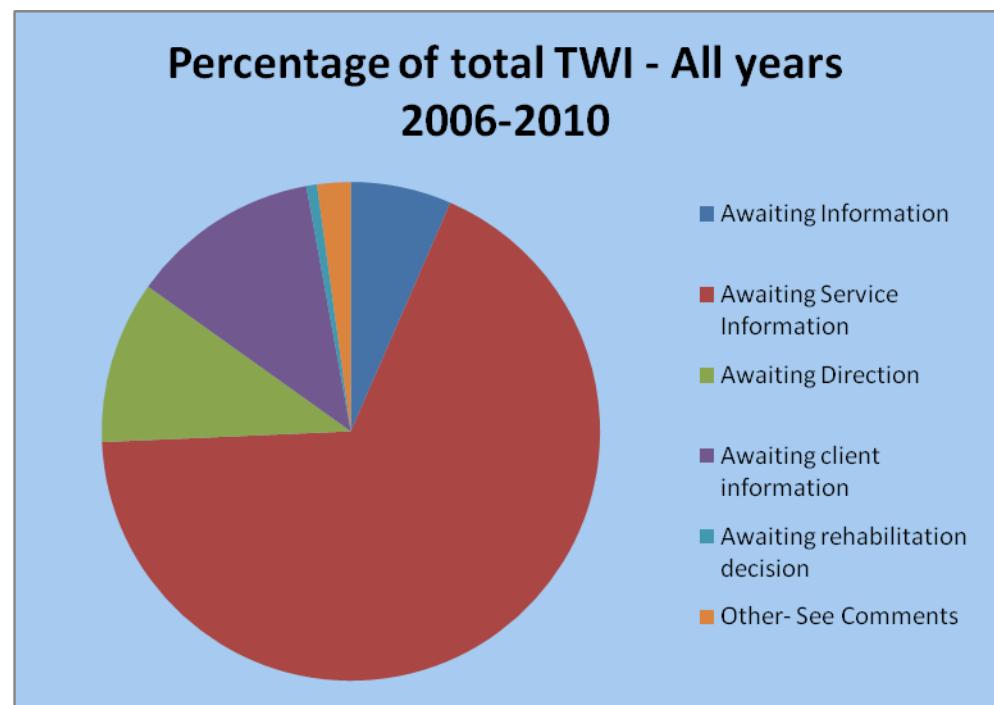
	HB for All Years 2006-2010	For 2006-2007	For 2007-2008	For 2008-2009	For 2009-2010
Number of Clients Applying	1,197	367	278	288	264
Number of Unique Applications	1,324	370	295	330	329
Number of Applications with All Information Completed	626	304	83	103	136
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	698	66	212	227	193
TAT for Decision (days)	59	81	53	66	33
Percentage Applications Approved	81.2%	68.9%	85.8%	84.5%	87.5%



		For All Years 2006-2010		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
Work Item Categories		Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)
	Awaiting Direction	2%	13	6%	5	3%	19	1%	15	0%	13
	Awaiting information from client	29%	56	52%	112	26%	41	22%	49	30%	32
	Awaiting pensioner status from DND	25%	35	1%	4	23%	35	30%	46	34%	21
	Awaiting information from SISIP	10%	12	2%	8	14%	6	12%	16	8%	15
	Awaiting rehab decision	18%	79	34%	99	22%	79	15%	80	12%	50
	Awaiting verification of release data	13%	32	0%	0	7%	22	20%	40	15%	23
	Awaiting other	3%	28	5.06%	29	6%	27	1%	30	0%	27

CAREER TRANSITION SERVICES PROGRAM SUMMARY

	JPP for All Years 2006-2010	For 2006-2007	For 2006-2008	For 2008-2009	For 2009-2010
Number of Clients Applying	996	68	102	504	322
Number of Unique Applications	996	68	102	504	322
Number of Applications with All Information Completed	317	51	38	153	75
Number of Applications Requiring Additional Information	679	17	64	351	247
TAT for Decision (days)	32	57	37	36	17
Percentage Applications Approved	90.3%	38.2%	85.3%	95.0%	95.3%



Work Item Categories		For All Years 2006-2010		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	Percentage of Total Work Item	TAT per Work Item (days)	
Awaiting Information	7%	60	0%	0	27%	60	7%	62	0%	15	
Awaiting Service Information	68%	9	17%	47	39%	9	67%	9	81%	8	
Awaiting Direction	11%	31	6%	120	27%	25	11%	32	6%	31	
Awaiting client information	12%	70	72%	27	2%	42	13%	90	10%	49	
Awaiting rehabilitation decision	1%	111	0%	0	1%	504	0%	30	1%	33	
Other- See Comments	2%	19	6%	30	4%	6	2%	34	2%	3	

ANNEX F – ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Additional potential improvements to the application process suggested by staff during interviews:

- VAC needs to improve upon the counselling provided to clients when applying for programs. Additional counselling would benefit VAC by managing client expectations of the services available for their unique conditions, as well as being able to accurately portray TAT for their application. Proper counselling would ensure only the required applications are completed and ensure they are completed in such a way as to minimize the wait times for additional information.
- The Quality of Life form needs to be redesigned. Clients do not understand the purpose of some questions and therefore struggle to answer the questions in the “correct” manner.
- Include on the rehabilitation application, “Why are you applying and what do you need to get better?”
- Make the application forms more user-friendly with check boxes and less narrative.
- Include a detailed guide for each application describing what is meant by the questions, why the questions are necessary and practical examples of what constitutes a complete answer.
- The online applications should have a self screening tool. The self screening tools would identify clients that appear to be good candidates for an online application. The online application should use smart form technology. Depending on the answers clients provide on the application, the form would be responsive to the answers provided in the sections previously completed.
- Applications need to be reviewed for plain language requirements.
- VAC should be using scanned documents to a greater degree. For example, service documents should be scanned into CSDN. If a client wishes to apply for rehab after receiving a disability award, their rehab application should indicate service docs already on file and any information from the DA application would be populated into the rehab application.

ANNEX G – PHOENIX STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE INC. FINAL REPORT



FINAL REPORT

NEW VETERANS CHARTER (NVC) FOCUS GROUPS

Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada

information@vac-acc.gc.ca

May 2010

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français sur demande.

Phoenix SPI is a 'Gold Seal Certified' Corporate Member of the MRIA



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Executive Summary

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. to conduct focus groups as part of a comprehensive evaluation of the New Veterans Charter (NVC). The purpose was to explore the following issues: the efficiency and effectiveness of VAC's outreach activities, the application process for NVC programs, satisfaction with NVC programs, VAC's efficiency and effectiveness in helping with the transition from military to civilian life, and unintended impacts resulting from implementation of the NVC.

There were two main target audiences for this research:

- **CF members who recently participated in a transition interview:** Within this audience, CF Regular Force members and released CF Reserve Force members were of special interest to VAC.
- **VAC clients participating in NVC programs:** Within this audience, the following subgroups were of special interest to VAC:
 - Veterans of the Regular Force released prior to the implementation of the NVC (i.e. April 1, 2006)
 - Veterans of the Regular Force released on or after the implementation of the NVC
 - Veterans of the Reserve Force
 - Spouses or survivors of veterans
 - Participants in the NVC's Job Placement Program.

A set of 12 focus groups was conducted in four locations April 19-27, 2010. Four groups each were conducted in Halifax and Quebec City (French), and two groups were conducted in each of Cold Lake and Mississauga. A separate moderator's guide was used with each of the following three target populations: released CF members who received a transition interview, VAC clients participating in NVC programs, and participants in the Job Placement Program specifically.

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but cannot be generalized to the full population of any of the audiences included in this research.

VAC Clients

Outreach Activities

Participants most often learned about NVC programs through Veterans Affairs Canada and word of mouth. Information from VAC was usually obtained through mail-outs, the VAC newsletter, and VAC counsellors and case managers. The VAC transition interview was identified by a number of CF veterans released on or after implementation of the



NVC. Word of mouth refers to other veterans, primarily through the Legion, and was most often identified by veterans of the Reserves and CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC.

Mail and phone were routinely identified as ways of obtaining program information. Information was also often obtained in-person, usually through a VAC counsellor or case manager, or through information sessions (e.g. SCAN sessions and/or transition interviews). Finally, a number of participants obtained information through VAC's website or by going through Google. Typically, information was sought on the website as a way to follow-up on information received in other ways (i.e. by mail, phone, or in-person).

Those who obtained information by mail or in-person tended to describe the process as easy and relatively problem-free. Clients who sought information on VAC's website tended to offer mixed assessments. While many described the process as relatively easy, some said they could either not find what they were looking for or had difficulty finding it. Clients were most likely to describe problems and difficulties obtaining program information by phone. The main reason had to do with the need to go through a call centre. Specifically, call centre agents are often unable to answer questions and will not put clients in direct contact with case managers. The problem is compounded by the fact that information sought by phone tends to be specific and therefore requires detailed program knowledge on the part of the information provider (something call centre agents usually do not have).

Overall, general information about programs was described as clear, complete, and accurate. There were, however, some qualifications. In terms of clarity, a number of clients described the information as sometimes too general or vague, and the language as sometimes bureaucratic and difficult to understand. Regarding the completeness of information, some clients observed that VAC staff could be more proactive in volunteering information. In terms of accuracy, a number of participants said they have on occasion received inconsistent or contradictory information from call centre agents. Overall, however, problems regarding the clarity, completeness, or accuracy of information tended to be linked to specific elements of the programs, as opposed to the programs in general.

Most clients felt that they obtained information about the programs they have used at the appropriate time (i.e. when they needed it). That said, most CF veterans and veterans of the Reserve Force also indicated that they would have liked to learn about available programs sooner (i.e. while still in the CF or Reserves).

Satisfaction with VAC staff providing information about programs was mixed. There was widespread satisfaction with the knowledge of VAC case workers and counsellors, while



assessments of the knowledge of call centre staff ranged from negative to neutral. Many clients saw the latter as 'gatekeepers' who could not answer most of their questions, but who would not put them through to those who could. Moreover, many clients observed that they sometimes get different answers from different agents when trying to resolve an issue with the call centre. Satisfaction with staff was also mixed in the sense that there was widespread satisfaction with the courtesy of staff and their desire to be helpful, but considerable dissatisfaction with the time and effort it often takes to resolve an issue.

There was a consensus that person-to-person contact is the most effective way for VAC to communicate with clients about its programs. This was seen to include in-person contact, communication by phone, and communication by email. Indeed, many clients said they would like to communicate with VAC by email because it is convenient, quick, allows for the give and take of conversation, and allows one to retain a record of exchanges. While person-to-person contact was preferred, a number of participants added that VAC should maintain all ways of communicating about its programs.

Clients collectively offered numerous suggestions to help VAC ensure that it provides information about its programs as effectively and efficiently as possible. Frequently-made suggestions included providing program information to CF members and reservists well before their release (so that it is easier to act on), allowing clients to enter into direct contact with their case workers and leave messages for them, providing more training to call centre staff so they are more knowledgeable about VAC programs, and advising VAC staff to be more proactive when dealing with clients (i.e. offer additional information that might be useful in addition to answering specific questions).



Application Process for NVC Programs

Overall assessments of the application process for a disability award tended to range from critical to neutral, with many describing the process as difficult, frustrating, and long. Frustration and difficulties were linked to the need to establish a direct link between one's disability and one's service, and the documentation requirements necessary to support one's claim. Although most described the form as relatively easy to understand, many described it as difficult to complete, repetitive in places, and including questions the purpose of which were not clear. Applicants were divided in terms of overall satisfaction with the application process. Some expressed satisfaction, focusing on the end result (i.e. receipt of a benefit award). Others expressed dissatisfaction based on the time and effort involved, as well as the stress associated with the process.

Feedback on the application process for Rehabilitation Services ranged from positive to neutral. Applicants experienced no problems or difficulties completing the application, and the application form was described as clear and easy to understand. Applicants also tended to be satisfied with the amount of time it took to process their application.

Satisfaction with and Impact of NVC Programs

Most participants expressed satisfaction with the service they received when using VAC programs, although satisfaction was more likely to be moderate than strong. Those who were not generally satisfied with service were more likely to be neutral not negative.

The main perceived service-related strength, by far, was the quality of VAC counsellors/case managers. This includes their knowledge of programs and services, attentiveness, and willingness to help. The only other strength identified with any frequency was the courteousness and willingness to help of call centre staff. The most frequently-identified weakness was the ability to get through to someone who can answer questions or resolve a problem. Other perceived weaknesses identified with some frequency include the timeliness of service, the inability to contact case managers directly, and call centre staff's limited knowledge of the details of VAC programs and services.

Most clients expressed satisfaction with the outcome or impact of programs they have used. More specifically, most felt that programs used in the past year supported their transition to civilian life, at least to a certain extent. Most clients also said they have experienced a positive change since their involvement in NVC programs. In most instances, this was described as relief or peace of mind resulting from the receipt of benefits or services. Most of the remaining clients felt that their condition had not changed noticeably one way or another (i.e. either positively or negatively). Some said they have experienced negative changes or impacts due to their involvement in NVC programs. These negative changes involved stresses related to applying for programs.

Recognition

Nearly all participants pointed to the range of VAC programs and services as an example of what VAC does to recognize veterans' service to Canada. Apart from these concrete examples, clients had difficulty articulating in a general way what VAC does in this regard. Many veterans were uncomfortable trying to think of additional ways for VAC to recognize their service, with some adding that they are not looking for recognition.

In terms of what constitutes recognition of veterans for their service to Canada, nearly all participants said it involves treating them with dignity and respect. Many added that this does not imply special treatment, but it does imply treating them in a certain way. For example, it was routinely suggested that it involves showing them respect when they apply for disability benefits and/or not making them feel like criminals when they apply for them. A number of participants said recognizing veterans means being proactive with them. This means checking in on them before they come to you and volunteering information instead of waiting for them to ask questions.

Participants tended to be divided about the extent to which VAC programs contribute to the participation or integration of veterans in their communities. Some felt that this was definitely the case, some were unsure, and some did not think so or felt that the impact was limited. Participants also provided mixed assessments of their own integration into civilian life. Some felt that they were fully integrated or integrated for the most part, some felt that they were well on their way, and some felt that they still had a ways to go.

Veterans who Received Transition Interview (TI)

Outreach Activities

All participants indicated that the purpose of the transition interview was explained to them in general terms at the beginning of the interview, and descriptions of what they were told were similar. According to participants, they were told that the interview was designed to inform them about VAC programs and services available to veterans, as well as to help orient them in terms of knowing where to go and who to talk to when in need.

Participants described the TI as a useful service in terms of informing them about the programs and services available and providing useful information about them. However, while useful in a general way, most participants did not tend to consider it personally useful or relevant in terms of identifying or discussing specific needs or issues relevant to their own transition from military to civilian life. Reasons included transitioning from the CF to the Reserves instead of to civilian life, lack of relevance of programs to them



personally, and already having specific job-related plans. A few felt that the TI was personally useful because it directed them to services designed to address specific needs.

Most participants described their transition interview as providing them with general information about VAC programs/services rather than guiding or referring them to specific services. However, most of them said they acted on information received through the interview by looking into programs in more detail and, in some cases, applying for them. Participants who said they were referred to specific services described the referrals as appropriate.

While no one described the information obtained after their TI as inconsistent with what they were told during their interview, participants observed that the information obtained afterwards was much more detailed. They explained that the information obtained during their TI was very general, and that only when trying to access programs or information about them did the details emerge. While no one said that the information from their interview generated any false expectations, some did say that the process of applying for programs was longer and more complicated than they had expected.

The suggestion offered most often for improving the transition interview was to inform releasing CF members of the purpose of the interview in advance. Another top suggestion was to inform releasing CF members about VAC programs prior to their interview. The rationale underpinning both suggestions was that this would allow participants to prepare for the interview by knowing its purpose and by going into it with a basic awareness of VAC programs. This would allow them to ask relevant questions. There was a consensus among participants that VAC should follow-up with participants in transition interviews, and that this should take the form of another one-on-one interview.

All participants said they were aware of the New Veterans Charter, though most said they only heard about it during their transition interview. Familiarity with the NVC was very general, amounting to awareness that it involves programs/services that target veterans. All participants were familiar with the NVC brochure they were shown, and most had received it or similar material during their TI. They also indicated that all the programs in the brochure were brought to their attention during their TI. There was a consensus that the information in the brochure is consistent with information received during their TI.

In terms of the most effective way for VAC to communicate about its programs, participants tended to focus on the timing of the information, suggesting that information be provided earlier, while people are still in the CF so that they can better act on medical requirements and can come to the TI more informed and therefore ask better questions.

Perception of Transition Needs

When it comes to the transition from military to civilian life, participants tend to consider lifestyle issues as the most important types of issues that need to be addressed (e.g. finding services such as family physicians and dentists). While there also tended to be agreement that employment-related issues are important, there was a sense that this depended on how long one had been in the CF/Reserves (e.g. less needed if getting full pension).

When it came to their own employment-related goals, participants were most likely to assign importance to job stability, followed by salary. Some also said one of their main goals was to find something different from what they did in the military. Employment-related challenges tended to depend on when and why one left the CF/Reserves. Challenges emphasized by participants who spent over 20 years in the CF and have a pension tended to have to do with finding a job that accommodates certain lifestyle choices (e.g. wanting leisure time, wanting more time with family, wanting part-time work). On the other hand, those who served less time in the CF were more likely to emphasize job stability and salary.

Participants in Job Placement Program (JPP)

Outreach Activities

Participants found out about the JPP during their SCAN seminar or through their Personnel Selection Office (PSO). Everyone described the information they received about the JPP as clear, complete, accurate, and timely.

All participants obtained details of the JPP through the contractor's website (i.e. Right Management). Some also said they obtained general information prior to going to the website through a SCAN seminar. No one experienced problems obtaining information about the program and its components, or registering for the program. Everyone expressed satisfaction with service received in relation to the program. Most participants had no suggestions to help VAC ensure that it provides information about its programs as effectively and efficiently as possible. The few suggestions made include making sure information gets out to individuals leaving the CF as early as possible before their release, and providing information through the medium of information sessions/professional development workshops offered by VAC personnel.

Application for JPP



Participants expressed overall satisfaction with the application process for the JPP. All applied for the program online, and no one experienced difficulties or problems completing the application process. They all described the application form as clear and easy to understand, and no one required assistance or support during the application process. In addition, everyone was satisfied with the amount of time they had to wait to learn whether or not their application was accepted.

Employment Goals and Status

When participants thought of their transition from the military to the civilian labour force, the employment or career-related goal identified most often was job stability. Other goals identified routinely included flexibility in work hours, the ability to develop new skills/do something different, salary, a good balance between work and family life, and the ability to use/transfer existing skills.

Most of the participants are currently employed, either full-time or part-time. Most of the rest are looking for employment, and a couple are currently in school/training. Employed participants expressed general satisfaction with their current jobs, adding that their current position allows them to use elements of their professional skills/training even though some are not working in their field of training or expertise. All but one of the employed participants said their current job meets their salary expectations.

Satisfaction with and Impact of Job Placement Program

All participants expressed satisfaction with the JPP, with many saying they were *very* satisfied with the program. The strengths identified most often include resumé writing/preparation and preparing for a job interview. Some described the program as very good in terms of identifying transferable skills, and a few said the program was very good in helping developing job search skills. There was also a consensus that the JPP helped identify and utilize existing skills, including specialized military career skills that could be transferred to a new civilian career.

When it came to perceived weaknesses in the program, some felt that it should include more job-related scenarios and role playing in order to help them prepare for real-life job interviews. Other weaknesses were identified by individuals and included limited one-on-one interaction with career counsellors, limited time in relation to the number of topics to cover, and not enough tailoring of instruction.

In terms of outcomes or impact, all participants expressed satisfaction with the program. In explaining why, they routinely observed that it helped bring their job-related skills up-to-



date and in so doing, increased their confidence in their skills. Some went further, observing that the JPP gave them skills they never had before because they had never actually gone through a job interview or written a resumé before. Nearly all the employed participants said the JPP helped them find their current job, at least to some extent. For their part, unemployed participants felt that their participation in the program has improved their chances of finding a job consistent with their employment goals.

Most suggestions regarding additional services or support VAC could provide to help the transition from a military to a civilian career related to the JPP itself. These included making the Job Search and Transition Workshop a little longer, having more role playing/scenarios, tailoring the sessions to address different needs/challenges, and having more one-on-one sessions with career counsellors. Looking beyond the JPP, it was suggested that VAC could organize job fairs for releasing CF members, including workshops with potential employers, provide information on other government job-related programs, develop a mentoring or job shadowing program, and follow up with releasing CF members a year or so after their participation in the JPP to see how they are doing.

Recognition

Participants pointed to the NVC programs and services, and the JPP in particular, as examples of what VAC does to recognize veterans' service to Canada. Beyond these examples, clients had difficulty articulating in a general way what VAC does in this regard.

Participants had some difficulty articulating what constitutes recognition of veterans for their service to Canada. Those who had a sense of what this involves focused on the transition from military to civilian life. To some, recognition means checking-in on veterans and following-up with them to see how they are doing in terms of their transition to civilian life. Some others felt that recognition means making people, employers in particular, aware that the skills developed in the military continue to be useful in civilian life.

More Information:

Supplier Name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.

PWGSC Contract Number: 51019-092009/001/MCT

Award Date: 2009-11-12

Contact Person: Philippe Azzie

To obtain more information on this study, please email information@vac-acc.gc.ca.



Introduction

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. to conduct focus group research as part of a comprehensive evaluation of the New Veterans Charter (NVC).

Background and Objectives

The NVC, which came into effect on April 1, 2006, provides a suite of programs and benefits to assist CF members, veterans, and their families in the transition to civilian life. The Charter represents the most sweeping change to veterans' benefits and services in the past 60 years, and therefore, it is important that it be evaluated.

The focus group research component of the evaluation of the NVC was intended to supplement and complement other data collection methods (e.g. client survey, staff interview summaries) by generating additional learning. The purpose of the focus groups was to help answer the following questions:

- How efficient and effective is VAC's outreach?
- How efficient and effective is the application process for NVC programs?
- How satisfied are clients with the NVC programs?
- How efficiently and effectively is VAC assisting CF members, veterans and their families, at making the transition from military to civilian life?
- What are the unintended impacts, if any, resulting from the implementation of the NVC?

Below, we identify the target audiences for this study, followed by a detailed description of the research methodology.

Target Audiences

There were two main target audiences for this research: CF members who have recently participated in VAC outreach activities, specifically a transition interview (TI), and VAC clients who are participating in NVC programs. As well, VAC was interested in subgroups of each of these main audiences:

- **CF members who recently participated in VAC outreach activities:** Within this audience, the following subgroups were of special interest to VAC:
 - Released CF Regular Force members
 - Released CF Reserve Force members.
- **VAC clients participating in NVC programs:** Within this audience, the following subgroups were of special interest to VAC:



- Veterans of the Regular Force released prior to the implementation of the NVC (i.e. April 1, 2006)
- Veterans of the Regular Force released on or after the implementation of the NVC
- Veterans of the Reserve Force
- Spouses or survivors of veterans
- Participants in the NVC's Job Placement Program.

Research Design

To address the research objectives, a set of focus groups was conducted April 19-27, 2010 with members of the audiences identified above. The following specifications applied to the focus groups:

- A set of 12 focus groups was conducted in the following four locations: Halifax, Quebec City (French), Cold Lake, and Mississauga. The distribution of focus groups per location was as follows¹:
 - Halifax (4 groups)
 - Quebec City (4 groups)
 - Mississauga (2 groups)
 - Cold Lake (2 groups)
- There were dedicated groups for each audience (i.e. there was no mixing of subgroups). The distribution of groups was as follows:
 - 2 groups with veterans of the Regular Force released prior to the implementation of the NVC.
 - 2 groups with veterans of the Regular Force released on or after the implementation of the NVC.
 - 2 group with veterans of the Reserve Force.
 - 2 groups with spouses or survivors of veterans.
 - 2 groups with participants in the NVC's Job Placement Program.
 - 2 groups with released CF members who received a transition interview.
- Participants were recruited using VAC client lists provided by the department in electronic format.
- A background letter was prepared for potential participants requesting more information about the study. The letter, on VAC letterhead, explained the purpose of the research, introduced Phoenix as the firm conducting it, offered assurances of confidentiality, encouraged participation, and provided a toll-free number to contact VAC in order to validate the research.
- Within each group, except those with spouses/survivors of veterans, there was a mix of participants by age, gender, year of retirement/discharge, number of years service in the CF, and element of the CF served in.
- With the exception of two groups, 10 participants were recruited for 7-8 to show per group.² There were at least six participants in all but three groups. The groups with spouses/survivors of veterans included two and four participants respectively, and one group with veterans who received a transition interview included four participants. However, as noted in footnote 2, the available sample for groups with spouses/survivors of veterans was very limited.
- Each participant received an honorarium of \$75 to thank them for their participation. In addition, seven participants requested and received reimbursements of \$30 for out-of-pocket expenses incurred as a result of travel and/or dependent care.

¹ The location and distribution of groups was finalized in consultation with VAC at the start of the project based on a variety of factors, including the number of clients in VAC District Office catchment areas, proximity to CF bases, and presence of CF elements (i.e. Navy, Army, Air Force).

² The exceptions were the two groups with spouses/survivors of veterans, for which available sample was very limited ($n = 10$ in Halifax, and $n = 25$ in Quebec City). Four participants were recruited for the group in Halifax, and seven for the group in Quebec City.



- The groups lasted two hours in length. The groups in Halifax, Quebec City, and Mississauga were conducted in regular focus group facilities. The groups in Cold Lake were held in a hotel meeting room. All locations were accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Sponsorship of the study was revealed (i.e. Veterans Affairs Canada).
- A separate moderator's guide was used with each of the following three target populations: released CF members who received a transition interview, VAC clients, and participants in the Job Placement Program.

A one-page summary report was provided for each focus group, highlighting some of the main findings in each session.

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but cannot be generalized to the full population of any of the audiences included in this research.

The principal investigators for this study were Stephen Kiar and Philippe Azzie. Philippe moderated the focus groups in Halifax, Quebec City, and Mississauga. Stephen moderated the groups in Cold Lake. Both contributed to the final report. Findings from the various focus groups were aggregated based on review and analysis of the moderators' notes and summary reports for each location.

Note to Readers

This report is divided into three sections: 1) Part 1 presents the results of the focus groups with VAC clients; 2) Part 2 presents the results of the focus groups with CF members who took part in a transition interview, and 3) Part 3 presents the results of the focus groups with participants in the Job Placement Program.

Appended to this report are the following, in both official languages:

- Recruitment screener
- Background letter
- Moderator's guides
- NVC brochure.



VAC Clients



Background/Contextual Information

This section provides background information about the VAC clients who participated in this aspect of the research. This includes CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC, CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC, veterans of the Reserve Force, and spouses or survivors of veterans.

CF Veterans Released Prior to Implementation of NVC

Service in the CF

Years of service in the CF among members of this audience ranged from fewer than five years to over 30 years. Most had served in the CF over 10 years, and nearly half served for over 20 years. There was a mix of participants by element of the service served in, and a few participants had served in more than one element. Most participants said they left the CF between 2000 and 2005, with the rest leaving throughout the 1990s. Some volunteered that they spent a few years in the Reserves after leaving the CF.

Use of VAC Programs

The length of time members of this audience have been using VAC programs started as recently as six months ago to as long as 17 years in total. Having said that, most have been using VAC programs since before the implementation of the NVC (i.e. for at least five years).

In terms of VAC programs used in the past year, over half said they received a disability award, and almost half said they received health benefits. Smaller numbers said they received rehabilitation services, financial benefits, and mental health support or 'counselling' during the past year. A few said they received an earnings loss award, while a few others said they have used the Veterans Independence Program (VIP). Finally, one participant said he/she participated in a work placement program (unspecified).

Close to half the participants said they have used more than one VAC program over the past year. In addition, many said they have launched appeals regarding decisions about certain VAC programs and services. When this was probed more generally with participants, most said they have launched appeals at some point over the last few years.

CF Veterans Released On or After Implementation of NVC

Service in the CF

Most members of this audience served for over 20 years in the CF. A few served for five years or less, one served 10 years, and another served 14 years. Nearly all had served

either in the army or air force, with a couple having served in the navy. All left the CF since 2007, with most leaving between 2008-2009.

Use of VAC Programs

Not surprisingly, most members of this audience are recent users of VAC programs and services. All but two said they have been using VAC programs for 1-2 years. One has been using VAC programs since 2005 and another since 2001 (he/she accessed VAC services after a first tour of duty in 2001).

Participants were most likely to have received a disability award and rehabilitation services during the previous year. Indeed, a majority of participants said they have received either or both of these. Some received health benefits and mental health support, and a couple participated in the Job Placement Program. One said he/she received an earnings loss award, and another has used the Veterans Independence Program (VIP). Some said they have used more than one VAC program over the past year, and probing revealed that many have launched appeals at some point over the last few years.

Veterans of Reserve Force

Service in the Reserves

The number of years that participants in these groups served in the Reserves varied from as little as one year to as many as 15. All but one had served in the army or air force (one served in the navy). Participants left the Reserves from as long ago as 32 years to as recently as one year ago. Having said that, most left the Reserves in the past decade (i.e. since 2000). In addition, over half had served in the CF prior to joining the Reserves, and most of those who served in the CF did so for over 20 years.

Use of VAC Programs

The length of time veterans of the Reserves have been using VAC programs ranged from as recently as a few months to as long as 20 years. Some specified that they began using VAC programs when they left the CF or transitioned from the CF to the Reserves. Having said that, most have been using VAC programs for five years or less. Participants were most likely to have received disability awards and health benefits during the past year. A few took part in the JPP, received health benefits, financial benefits, rehabilitation services, and mental health services. One said he/she received an earnings loss benefit, and another took part in a transition interview. As was the case with CF veterans, a number of former reservists have launched appeals regarding VAC services.

Spouses/Survivors of veterans



All participants from this audience were spouses of CF members, and all but one were themselves users of NVC programs and services. Most have been receiving VAC services since 2006. One has been using VAC programs since 1998, and another since 2002. Most of those who personally accessed VAC services received rehabilitation and/or financial services. Two received mental health support/counselling, one received a disability award, and one is in the VIP Program. The participant who received services through her spouse said they (i.e. she and her spouse) received financial services, family support services, health services, a disability award, and social support services.

VAC Clients in General

Widespread But Very General Awareness of NVC

Nearly all VAC clients, regardless of the specific audience, said they are familiar with the New Veterans Charter (NVC). That said, some VAC clients said that while they are aware of the NVC, they are unsure whether or not certain programs they used in the past year are part of it. This includes the VIP program and the earnings loss program. The small number of VAC clients who were not aware of the NVC included CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC and reservists.

While familiarity with the NVC was widespread, it tended to be very general, typically amounting to awareness that some or all of the programs used are part of it. Many volunteered that the NVC is just a name to them, or something they have seen or heard referenced in materials they have received or seen. Beyond this, the only frequently-identified aspect of the NVC was the change from a disability pension to a lump sum disability award. A number of participants, primarily CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC, criticised this change.

Nearly all other aspects of the NVC that participants claimed to know about had to do with the range or variety of its programs and services. Specifically, each of the following was identified by small numbers of participants as things they know about the NVC:

- It includes a wider array of services than what was available before.
- It offers more rehabilitation and counselling services than previously offered by VAC.
- It provides more support services.
- It provides more psychological programs.
- It covers both physical and mental needs.

Some participants described the NVC as recognition or acknowledgement of certain changes that have occurred in the CF. This includes a few spouses who said the NVC programs recognize or take into account that most veterans have families that are affected by the various problems that veterans face. For their part, a few former CF



members described the NVC as acknowledgement that modern veterans face serious psychological problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.



Outreach Activities

This section reports on information and communications issues related to programs available under the New Veterans Charter.

VAC, Word of Mouth – Main Sources of Information About NVC Programs

Participants recall first learning or finding out about NVC programs they have used in various ways. Two sources were identified most often, however, as initial sources of information about the NVC programs used in the past year:

- *Veterans Affairs Canada*: Perhaps not surprisingly, VAC was routinely identified as a source of information about NVC programs. This usually included information received in the mail (including the brochure handed out in the groups, which most participants were familiar with), the VAC newsletter *Salute*, and VAC counsellors and case managers. Some said they first learned about NVC programs through VAC's website or call centre. The transition interview was a source of information identified specifically by a number of CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC. Finally, a few participants said they learned about programs through a VAC ombudsman, a VAC representative in a regional office, or VAC staff visiting a CF base.
- *Word of mouth*: Word of mouth was also a frequently-identified source of information about NVC programs, especially among veterans of the Reserves and CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC. Typically, information was obtained from other veterans, primarily but not only through the Legion. In some instances, information was obtained through a treating physician familiar with VAC programs. For example, a spouse of a veteran said she was referred to a VAC case manager by a physician who had been treating her husband. Another was informed about NVC programs through a family physician. The importance of word of mouth as a source of information was evident in the focus groups themselves, with participants routinely gathering after their session to exchange information or details about VAC programs.

Two sources of information were identified less frequently or by a specific audience:

- *Newspapers/magazines*: Some participants said they first heard about the programs they used in the past year through newspapers or magazines that focus on information for CF and former CF members (excluding VAC's newsletter identified above). This includes the Legion magazine, the Tribune newsletter, the Maple Leaf newsletter, the Canadian Forces Personnel newsletter and Trident News (the base newspaper for CFB Halifax).
- *DND SCAN Seminar*: A number of CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC said they learned about NVC programs during their SCAN seminar.

Sources of information identified by individuals or no more than a few participants included the following: DND personnel, an advocate during an appeals process, and Occupational Stress Injury Support Services (OSISS).

Finally, some participants said they could not recall how they first learned about the NVC programs they have used in the past year.



When Participants Learned About NVC Programs Varies by Audience

The way in which VAC clients identify when they found out about NVC programs they have used in the past year tended to vary by audience. CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC and veterans of the Reserve Force tended to identify the approximate period in which the NVC was implemented (i.e. around 2006) as when they found out about the NVC programs they've used. This is not surprising given that many of the participants in these two audiences have been clients of VAC for a number of years and/or their association with the department pre-dates the implementation of the NVC.

For their part, CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC tended to focus on the time or events surrounding their release from the CF in terms of when they found out about NVC programs. For example, they tended to say they found out about these programs around the time of their release, during a SCAN seminar, or during a transition interview.

Spouses of veterans tended to focus on specific events rather than times to explain when they found out about the programs used in the past year. Not surprisingly, these events involved their spouses. For example, one was contacted by a VAC counsellor when her spouse was killed in the line of duty, another was informed about services when she became estranged from her spouse, one was referred to a case manager by a physician treating a spouse, and one found out through her spouse.

In addition to these audience-specific descriptions, some said they found out about these programs during their medical release from the CF, while some said they found out about them during an appeal process. A few found out about them during a home visit from a VAC counsellor. Not surprisingly, some could not recall when they found out about NVC programs they have used in the past year.

Clients Obtain Information About NVC Programs in Various Ways

VAC clients obtained information about NVC programs in various ways, methods often used in combination:

- *Mail:* Mail was routinely identified as a way of obtaining program information, with many adding that this was also how they first heard about the NVC. Many also observed that information was sent to them from VAC by mail without their having to request it (i.e. as an information package).
- *Phone:* The phone was also routinely identified as a source of information about NVC programs. This involves phoning the VAC call centre for information and/or trying to reach a case manager through the call centre.

- *In-person:* Program information, typically in hard copy format, was often obtained in-person, usually through a VAC counsellor or case manager, or through information sessions, such as SCAN sessions and/or transition interviews. CF veterans released on or after the implementation of the NVC were most likely to say they obtained information through information sessions. Other ways of receiving information in-person included the following:
 - Some, including spouses of veterans, specified that they received in-person information through home visits by VAC counsellors or case managers.
 - Some said they received information in-person through Occupational Stress Injury Support Services (OSISS).
 - Some veterans said they received information in-person with their release papers from the CF.
 - A few said they obtained information in-person by walking into a VAC regional office.
- *Internet:* A number of participants said they obtained information through VAC's website or by going through Google (i.e. using the search engine to look for specific information). Typically, information was sought on the website as a way to follow-up on information received in other ways (i.e. by mail, phone, or in-person). In some instances, however, clients first sought information on the VAC website, and then called VAC's call centre if they could not find what they were seeking.

Ease of Obtaining Information Tends to be Linked to Communication Channel

The ease of obtaining information about NVC programs, as well as specific problems or difficulties encountered, tended to be linked to methods used to obtain information. Those who obtained information by mail, for example, described the process as easy because, as noted above, mailed information tended to be sent without having to request it. In other words, the information came to them, so they did not have to go look for it. Obtaining information in-person also tended to be described as relatively problem-free because of the ability to deal with someone one-on-one and get specific answers to specific questions.

Clients were much more likely to describe problems and difficulties obtaining program information by phone. Two reasons were offered to explain why this was the case:

- *Process for getting information by phone:* The reason given most often to explain the difficulty in getting information by phone had to do with the way the system is set up. As noted above, getting information by phone involves phoning the VAC call centre. Participants routinely described the following problems obtaining information this way:
 - Call centre staff may not be able to answer a question, either because it is too specific or relates to one's own situation. If they cannot answer the question immediately, one must wait to be re-contacted by them.
 - Clients cannot contact their case managers by phone. They must leave a message with a call centre agent and wait to be re-contacted by their case manager.



- Case managers and call centre agents do not always re-contact clients in a timely fashion.

In short, one of the main problems with getting information by phone is the amount of time one may have to wait to get it.

- *Specificity of information sought by phone:* Many clients explained that they have had more difficulty obtaining information by phone because the information they seek by phone tends to be specific and detailed as opposed to general. The more specific the information sought, the more knowledgeable the information provider needs to be. Some added that this is precisely why they want to be able to contact their case managers directly (i.e. the latter are likely to be able to answer their question). Indeed, there was widespread agreement among clients that when they are able to speak with their case managers one-on-one, they usually get the information they need. Unfortunately, the system of communication by phone does not allow them to do this.

Clients who sought information on VAC's website tended to provide mixed assessments of the ease of finding information. While many described the process as relatively easy and problem-free, some said they could either not find what they were looking for or had difficulty finding it. For example, some described the home page as too 'busy', making it difficult to orient oneself. Some others described the NVC programs as too buried in the site. Finally, a few described the sheer amount of information on the site as making it difficult to get one's bearings and find what is needed.

Finally, some clients explained that they encountered difficulty obtaining program information because their case manager had just changed and they were encountering difficulties establishing contact with the new one.

General Information About Programs Tends to be Clear

Overall, general information provided to clients or obtained by them about programs they have used in the past year was described as clear and relatively easy to understand. This included information about program objectives, how the programs work, services provided, who can apply, and eligibility requirements. A number of clients described the information as being sometimes too general or vague, and many also described some of the language used as bureaucratic and difficult to understand. Beyond that, however, lack of clarity or difficulty understanding information tended to be linked to specific elements of the programs as opposed to the programs in general.

The types of issues involving lack of clarity typically included the following:

- The charts used for the Disability Award, with which a number of participants struggled.
- What expenses are covered and/or not covered by a program.

- Formulae used to calculate financial benefits or how a benefit amount had been arrived at.
- The roles and responsibilities of sub-contractors.
- The duration and/or number of sessions covered by a program (e.g. number of counselling sessions covered).

Some participants observed that it was not clear to them why they qualified for certain benefits. They explained that they were simply contacted and informed that they might qualify for certain benefits, so they filed applications and were later informed that they were accepted.

Basic Information Described as Complete, But Many Want More Proactiveness

Clients tended to describe the basic program information they received or obtained as complete. The main criticism regarding the completeness of information received was linked to the provision of information in a proactive manner. Specifically, a number of clients observed that when it comes to getting program information, VAC staff could do a better job *volunteering* information. To be clear, these clients did not expect to receive all program information right up front and all at once. However, they did feel that there were times when information should be volunteered as useful, even if it was not requested. This was based on their own experience finding out things that would have been useful to know earlier.

Beyond this general criticism, program information that was seen to be incomplete tended to involve specifics. Information described as incomplete (i.e. information that clients felt they should have known about earlier than they did) included the following:

- Whether or not there is a limit on the number of rehabilitation sessions VAC will pay for.
- Knowing whether there are subcontractors involved in service provision, including who they are and how to contact them.
- Knowing that services may be terminated if VAC is late in making payments.
- Knowing that medically-releasing patients do not qualify for one-on-one sessions in the Job Placement Program.
- Knowing that one will not receive re-training through the Rehabilitation program if one is considered to have existing employable skills.
- Knowing whether or not earnings loss benefits need to be declared to the Canada Revenue Agency.

Information Doesn't Generate False Expectation, Though it Can be Inconsistent

Overall, basic program information tends to be viewed as accurate. That said, a number of participants said that they have, on occasion, received inconsistent or contradictory information from call centre agents. Specifically, these clients described situations where they were given information by one call centre agent and then different information by another agent on a subsequent occasion. Some added that this was more frequent when the NVC was first being implemented and VAC personnel were not yet very familiar with it.

Beyond that, inaccurate program information (as was the case with incomplete information) tended to involve specifics. The most common example of inaccurate information involved using incorrect calculations or formulae to determine the amount of a benefit. However, these mistakes were corrected once they were discovered. Some participants described situations where they were informed that they had been approved for a specific program when they had not yet been approved (i.e. they were subsequently approved). Finally, a few clients described situations where they were told that they had been approved for a specific program, only to be informed subsequently that they had not.

Despite the foregoing, clients felt that they had generally received what they expected or what they were promised. At most, some claimed that they did not receive *as much* as they expected, as *quickly* as they expected, or *as often* as they expected (i.e. in terms of the number of rehabilitation or counselling sessions).

Most Received Information at Right Time, But Some Would Have Liked it Sooner

Most clients felt that they obtained information about the programs they have used at the appropriate time (i.e. when they needed it). That said, most CF veterans and veterans of the Reserve Force also indicated that they would have liked to learn about all available programs sooner (i.e. while still in the CF or Reserves). For CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC, this was academic, but the point being made was that CF members and reservists should be informed about all VAC programs and services prior to their release. Some veterans observed that this would allow them to ensure that they have everything they need in terms of required documentation as they leave military life (e.g. (CF98 forms, medical records). It was observed that getting this information is easier to act on while still in the CF or the Reserves.

Some clients, on the other hand, did not feel that they received program information at the appropriate time. This included a few veterans who said they did not learn about the Job Placement Program until a few years after their release, at which time they no longer qualified for it. It also included a few who said that their transition from the CF would have been easier if they had found out about certain financial benefits sooner than they did.

Most Familiar with NVC Brochure

Most clients were familiar with the information brochure identifying programs available under the NVC. There was a consensus that the information was clear and easy to understand, and a near-consensus that it contained all the information required for a brochure. In other words, no one thought that the brochure contained all the information needed regarding the programs, but nearly all agreed that it contained sufficient information to point people in the right direction in order to get more information.

A few clients felt the information was too general, though there were no suggestions on what additional information should be included. A few others suggested that the guide should be more proactive by specifically inviting people to contact VAC if they are not sure whether they qualify for certain programs.

When it came to awareness of the programs described in the brochure, a majority in each group claimed to be aware of most, if not all, programs. Programs that clients were most likely to be aware of include the disability award, financial benefits, rehabilitation services, and health benefits. Awareness of the following programs was less widespread: the Job Placement Program, family support services, and mental health and social support services.

Mixed Assessments of VAC Staff

Satisfaction with VAC staff providing information about programs was mixed, though there was general agreement that the situation has improved since the implementation of the NVC. Many clients observed that when the NVC was first implemented, the VAC staff they dealt with were often not very well informed about NVC programs and were learning about them as they were providing service.

Satisfaction with VAC staff was mixed in that clients tended to distinguish between case workers and counsellors on the one hand and call centre agents on the other. There was widespread satisfaction with the program knowledge of VAC case workers and counsellors. These individuals were routinely described as having detailed knowledge of the programs and clients' individual situations. Having said that, a few clients said they were not satisfied with their case workers because they are not proactive in volunteering information and usually take a long time getting back to them when they leave a message. As well, a few clients said that while they are generally satisfied with their case workers, there are sometimes problems when they are assigned a new case worker because this individual may not be up-to-speed on their situation.



Assessments of the knowledge of call centre staff ranged from negative to neutral. Many clients saw them as 'gatekeepers' who could not answer most of their questions but would not put them through to those who could (i.e. their case managers). A number of clients said they understand that call centre agents are doing their best, but the general feeling was that they do not have detailed knowledge of programs, and therefore can only answer questions of a very general nature. Moreover, many clients observed that they sometimes get different answers to their questions in the process of trying to resolve an issue with call centre staff.

Satisfaction with staff was also mixed in the sense that there was widespread satisfaction with the courtesy of staff and their desire to be helpful, but widespread dissatisfaction with the time and effort it often takes to resolve an issue. Clients routinely gave two reasons to explain the time it takes to resolve an issue: 1) the way the phone communication system is set up, which does not allow clients to contact case managers directly; and 2) the fact that case workers have numerous clients assigned to them and therefore a number of issues to deal with at the same time.

Assessment of Communications Channels

Clients had no difficulty identifying the advantages and disadvantages of various ways of communicating with or receiving information from VAC regarding its programs. Moreover, they tended to assess the various strengths and weaknesses of these channels in the same way:

- *In-person:* In-person contact was the clear preference among all clients in terms of a way of communicating with VAC. Moreover, it was the only channel of communication with which no disadvantages were associated. Having said that, many clients added the caveat that it is the best channel of communication providing that the staff person one is dealing with is knowledgeable. The strengths of this channel included the following: it allows for back and forth communication (e.g. question and answer), it is personalized and/or case specific, one has the full attention of the staff member in question, and one is dealing with a single individual, which is the best way to resolve an issue.
- *Brochures:* There was widespread agreement that brochures are good for providing a summary or quick overview of programs and services, and for broadcasting or raising awareness about them. Their main weakness or disadvantage is that the information is generic (i.e. not personalized) and lacks detail. Brochures were not considered personally useful to participants unless they contain information about new programs. In other words, since clients tend to be acquainted with the NVC programs, brochures about them were not considered useful in terms of going forward.
- *Telephone:* Like in-person contact, communication by phone was described as a very good way of communicating. Indeed, many described it as a form of person-to-person contact. That being said, clients routinely added the same caveat they did in their positive assessment of in-person communication – communication by phone is effective if one gets through to the right person or if one can deal with the same

person in trying to resolve an issue. Otherwise, it was observed that communication by phone can be a nightmare (e.g. waiting to speak to a call centre agent, getting bounced around from one agent to another, getting different answers to the same question). The key disadvantage of phone contact is that there is no record of what was said. In commenting on communication by phone, participants routinely pointed to their own experience, observing that it is very effective if and when they can speak to their case manager, but ineffective in that they have to go through the call centre to do so.

- *Mail:* Mail, like brochures, was considered good for broadcasting information and for ensuring that everyone gets the same information. It was also routinely described as a good communications channel for receiving confirmations of acceptance in a program because it provides a record or paper trail that one can use if needed. Some clients also described mail as good for receiving updates and information about changes to programs. The main disadvantage of mail, like brochures, is that the information tends to be generic and therefore may be of little if any personal relevance.
- *Internet:* The main advantages of the Internet were speed and convenience in terms of accessing information. Convenience had to do with the fact that information is accessible on a 24/7 basis. Some clients also said the Internet is a good channel for following up on information received by phone, mail, or in brochures. In other words, one can be directed to a website for additional information. The main disadvantages were that information tends to be general and can often be difficult to find. It was also noted that some people still do not have access to the Internet or are not comfortable using it.

Person-to-Person – Most Effective Way for VAC to Communicate

There was a consensus that personal or person-to-person contact is the most effective way for VAC to communicate with clients about its programs. Reasons given to explain why were the same ones identified above. It is important to add that person-to person contact was seen to include in-person contact, communication by phone, and communication by email. Indeed, many clients said they would like to communicate with VAC by email because it is convenient, quick, allows for the give and take of conversation, and allows one to retain a record of exchanges. Some said they have asked about this but were informed that VAC will not communicate by email because of concerns about the security of information.

While person-to-person contact was identified as the most effective way for VAC to communicate about its programs, a number of participants added that VAC should nonetheless maintain all of its current ways of communicating about its programs.

Suggestions to Ensure Program Information is Provided Effectively & Efficiently

Clients collectively offered numerous suggestions to help VAC ensure that it provides information about its programs as effectively and efficiently as possible. Frequently-made suggestions are identified by an asterisk (*):



- *Provide VAC program information to CF members and reservists well before their release (so that it is easier to act on).
- *Allow clients to enter into direct contact with their case workers and leave messages for them.
- *Provide more training to call centre staff so they are more knowledgeable about VAC programs.
- *Advise VAC staff to be proactive when dealing with clients (i.e. offer additional information that might be useful in addition to answering specific questions).
- Offer information seminars prior to release from the CF/Reserves and a few after release to check-in with veterans regarding awareness of programs.
- Ensure that communications materials like brochures include enough information to allow veterans to follow-up in terms of getting more detailed program information.
- Allow email communication between clients and their case managers.
- Develop online accounts for Veterans, where they can go check for information/updates on the programs they use (e.g. 'you currently receive ...'; 'your next payment will be issued on ...').
- Delegate more responsibility to the regions so that issues can be resolved more quickly.
- Hire more case managers so that each one's case load is lighter. This would allow more frequent communication between client and case manager.
- Make sure military physicians know about NVC programs so that they can inform veterans about all of the medical information and records they might need.
- Hire more staff, including veterans who understand the types of problems faced by their companions.

Application Process for NVC Programs

This section reports on the application process for the Disability Award program and Rehabilitation Services. Therefore, feedback was provided only by those who had experience with the application processes for either or both of these programs.

Application Process for Disability Award

By way of background information, it should be kept in mind that many clients who have applied for a disability award have launched appeals on decisions and been through the appeals process. Therefore, it was difficult for some to separate the application process from the appeals process. In their minds, these were part of the same process and it clearly influenced their perception of the process.

Many Describe Application Process for Disability Described as Difficult

Overall assessments of the application process for a disability award tended to range from critical to neutral, with many describing the process in general as difficult, frustrating, and long. Some, however, expressed general satisfaction with the process, despite such difficulties. In explaining their frustration or difficulty with the application process, applicants tended to focus on two inter-related aspects of the process.

- *Linking disability to service:* When explaining the difficulty of the application process for a disability award, applicants routinely pointed to the need to establish a direct link between one's disability and one's service in the CF or the Reserves. Applicants emphasized the word 'direct', explaining that the inability to establish a clear and direct link will result in denial of benefits. Many observed that this requirement is designed to weed out bogus applications, but that it also has the effect of dismissing legitimate claims that cannot be established beyond a shadow of a doubt. Because of this stringent requirement, many felt that the application process is designed to limit the number of claims that get accepted.
- *Providing documentation to support claim:* Applicants also routinely pointed to the documentation requirements necessary to support one's claim. They routinely observed that one must have all one's medical records and service health records and that gathering this documentation is an ordeal. Moreover, many said that because they were missing or unable to retrieve documentation (e.g. a CF 98 form), their claim was rejected. In the words of one client, unless you have all your medical records and a physician on your side, don't bother to apply.

As a general comment, many applicants described the process as psychologically difficult. Some explained that it made them feel like they were begging for benefits while others said it made them feel like they had to prove they are not crooks. Some said the process made them feel like complainers, which was a psychological strain because complaining is at odds with their military training (i.e. they are trained not to complain).



Many Obtained Assistance With Application Process

Most applicants for a disability award said they were aware that assistance was available to help with the application process, though a few said they did not know this. Many said they were assisted in going through the application process. Such assistance was provided by other veterans, members of the Legion, lawyers, and VAC case managers and counsellors.

Application Form Relatively Easy to Understand, but Still Difficult for Many

While the application form itself was described by most as relatively easy to understand, some described it as difficult to understand due to the type of language used, which was described as too bureaucratic or 'legalese'. Although most described the form itself as relatively easy to understand, many nevertheless described it as difficult to complete, repetitive in places, and including questions the importance or purpose of which were not clear (see details below). Some said they had no difficulty completing the form because they have done this on a number of occasions and the application form is the same, regardless of the disability.

Generally speaking, applicants tended to be indifferent or neutral about the reasonableness or necessity of the questions asked. To most, answering such questions was merely par for the course (i.e. something that needed to be done). In addition, it was observed that some questions are optional and do not need to be answered. Some, however, criticized the application form because it includes questions described as unnecessary or inappropriate (e.g. can you use public transportation?, does your disability affect your sex life?). Some also criticized it because response options to certain questions were considered too limited (e.g. 'can you do ...': 'yes', 'no', 'with assistance'), constraining applicants to be categorical where nuances are required.

Processing Time Considered Too Long for Some, Acceptable to Others

Some applicants expressed frustration at the length of time it took to process their application (i.e. the amount of time they had to wait after submitting the application to learn about whether or not it was accepted). One such applicant waited just over one year for his application to be processed, though he did not specify whether or not this included an appeal. Others felt that the time they had to wait was reasonable or acceptable.

Applicants Divided in Terms of Satisfaction with Application Process

Applicants were divided in terms of overall satisfaction with the application process. Some expressed overall satisfaction with the process, focusing on the end result (i.e. receipt of a benefit award) and observing that rigour in the process is required in order to prevent fraudulent claims. Others expressed dissatisfaction based on the time and effort involved, as well as the psychological stress associated with the process. A few added that



veterans may already be suffering physically and emotionally when preparing their application and the process should not add to their stress.

Suggestions to Improve Application Process

The most frequently made suggestions for improving the application process were general in nature and focussed on making the application process as easy as possible. They included not treating applicants as crooks trying to defraud the system and not forcing them to prove their case beyond a shadow of a doubt. Specific suggestions were identified by small numbers of applicants and included the following:

- Ensure people leave the CF or Reserves with all the documents and records they will need to submit a claim for a disability benefit.
- Employ individuals whose role is to help veterans complete their applications. Such individuals would help veterans understand the application process and assist them in making their applications as complete and solid as possible. It was observed that veterans might not be in the best frame of mind when applying for a disability award and would therefore profit from having someone assist them.
- Make the application form less generic (i.e. tailor it to specific disabilities such as hearing loss).
- Use less bureaucratic language in the form.
- Allow for the possibility of providing more nuanced answers (e.g. 'on a scale of 1-10, to what extent does your disability affect your ability to ...').

Application Process for Rehabilitation Services

Feedback on the application process for Rehabilitation Services was more limited, due to time constraints. In those groups where it was explored, feedback ranged from positive to neutral. Applicants experienced no problems or difficulties completing the application and the application form was described as clear and easy to understand. Applicants also tended to be satisfied with the amount of time it took to process their application, though one applicant (a spouse) observed that it takes longer to process an application if one is a veteran's spouse than if one is a veteran. The only suggestion for improving the application process was to treat applications from spouses of veterans and veterans equally (i.e. don't take more time to process the application of a spouse).



Satisfaction With and Impact of NVC Programs

This section reports on service delivery issues related to programs used by focus group participants, including their perceptions of the impact of the programs in terms of helping them and other veterans make the transition to civilian life.

Overall Satisfaction with Service, Takes Into Account Strengths & Weaknesses

All things considered, most participants expressed satisfaction with the service they received when using VAC programs, although satisfaction was more likely to be moderate than strong. Having said that, some clients expressed strong satisfaction, adding that service exceeded their expectations. Those who were not generally satisfied with service were more likely to be neutral rather than negative, with many observing that VAC resources are limited and stretched, and that the department is doing the best it can under the circumstances. Finally, a few clients expressed disappointment with service received.

Regardless of their overall assessment, clients were clearly considering both strengths and weaknesses before pronouncing themselves on this issue. In other words, overall assessments took into account a mix of perceived strengths and weaknesses in service.

Assessments of Service Sometimes Influenced by Experience with Disability Award

Before discussing perceived strengths and weaknesses of service, it is important to note that some participants' overall assessments of service were influenced by one or both of two factors. First, some clients' assessments were influenced by their views about the way the disability program is set up. Specifically, there was considerable criticism of the shift from a disability pension to a lump-sum disability award. This criticism tended to be made by CF veterans released prior to the implementation of the NVC and veterans of the Reserve Force. Second, some assessments of service were influenced by the experience of the appeals process. As noted in the background section, many clients have launched appeals related to disability claims, and this experience has influenced perceptions of service. The general impression that these factors have generated for certain clients is that VAC is trying to divest itself of responsibility for veterans, either by giving them a lump-sum payment instead of a pension, or by denying them certain disability benefits.

VAC Case Managers – Main Strength of Service

In terms of service obtained when using VAC programs, the main perceived strength, by far, was the quality of VAC counsellors/case managers. Although some clients were not satisfied with their case managers, the large majority were, and identified this as the main strength in terms of service received. This includes their knowledge of programs and services, attentiveness, and willingness to help. In short, one-on-one service was the most

frequently-identified strength of service. The only other perceived strength identified with any frequency was the courteousness and willingness to help of call centre staff.

Perceived strengths identified by small numbers of participants included the following:

- The range of VAC programs/benefits available.
- The provision/inclusion of mental health support services.
- The Job Placement Program.
- OSISS
- The amount of information available on the VAC website.

In discussing strengths, a few clients volunteered that while it takes time to be approved for a program, once one is approved, there are no more questions asked.

Ability to Get Through to Someone Who Can Help – Main Perceived Weakness

As with the perceived strengths, one perceived weakness tended to be identified much more often than any other – the ability to get though to someone who can answer questions or resolve a problem. Moreover, it is important to note that the most frequently-identified weakness and most frequently-identified strength are directly related to each other. While the main perceived strength is the quality of VAC counsellors/case managers, the main perceived weakness is the ability to get through to them.

Other perceived weaknesses identified with some frequency included:

- The timeliness of service, including the length of the approval process for various programs and the amount of time it can take to get a response to a question.
- The inability to be able to contact case managers directly.
- Call centre staff that do not understand the details of VAC programs and services.

These problems tended to be linked to one another in that participants felt that if they could contact their case managers directly, it would take less time to obtain answers to their questions or resolve their issues. Put differently, there was a sense among a number of clients that the communications system with VAC is set up in such a way that they have direct contact with staff that cannot answer most of their questions (i.e. call centre staff), instead of with staff that can answer their questions (i.e. case managers).

Other perceived weaknesses were identified infrequently, and included the following:

- Use of bureaucratic language in application forms.
- Lack of proactivity in providing program information.
- The amount of bureaucracy/number of tiers and working groups that one must go through in order to be approved for a program.
- The disability award application process.
- The appeals process.
- The time it takes to process travel claims.
- Lack of coordination/communication with subcontractors (e.g. loss of documents, delays in getting service).
- Lack of VAC resources/staff.

Most Satisfied with Impact of VAC Programs

Despite their criticisms of various service-related aspects of VAC programs, most clients expressed satisfaction with the outcome or impact of programs they have used. Beyond this, some clients indicated that while the process of getting approved for a program can be long and/or frustrating, they are at least somewhat satisfied with the outcome. Moreover, a few other clients said they are grateful for the benefits received even if it might not be as much as they had expected.

Most participants felt that the programs they have used in the past year supported their transition to civilian life, at least to a certain extent. The most frequently-given reason to explain how programs have helped in this transition focused on the provision of financial benefits or resources, which help meet basic needs or defray the cost of services they would otherwise have to pay for. Beyond this, some observed that counseling services have helped them adjust to civilian life by allowing them to feel good about themselves, while some others observed that rehabilitation services allowed them to return to school. A few pointed to the Job Placement Program as providing them with skills needed to adjust to the civilian labour force. Finally, a few said that the VAC services they received helped them stay in, and participate in, the community in which they wanted to live.

Most veterans who felt that the programs they have used in the past year have not supported their transition to civilian life explained that they made this transition a number of years ago. A few others explained that when they left the CF they went into the reserves so that they have yet to make the transition to civilian life. Finally, a few spouses of veterans did not feel the programs they used in the past year supported their transition to civilian life because they always considered themselves civilians despite being married to CF members. That being said, they all described the services as helpful.

Some veterans recently released from the CF did not feel the programs they have used in the past year have supported their transition to civilian life, at least not yet. The main reason given to explain why was the amount of time required to get services. As an example, two participants said they are still waiting to be approved for vocational training that will help them in their transition to civilian life.

General Impression That Programs Should Have Been Accessed Earlier

Most participants felt that the programs they used would have been more beneficial to them if they had accessed them earlier. However, in explaining why, many observed that it had to do with the time it took for them to receive service. In other words, if they had applied earlier, they would have started receiving services earlier. Some participants receiving rehabilitation services explained that they would have benefited from earlier access to programs because their conditions have worsened over time. In other words, if services had been accessed earlier their condition would not be as severe now because their problems would have been addressed before their condition deteriorated. Finally, a few clients explained that if they had accessed services earlier (i.e. when still in the CF), it would have been easier for them to track down documents to support their disability award claims.

Most Have Experienced Positive Change Due to Involvement in NVC Programs

Most participants have experienced a positive change since their involvement in NVC programs. In most instances, the positive change was described as relief or peace of mind resulting from the receipt of benefits or services. Some clients receiving rehabilitation services explained that their physical or mental condition has improved and that they are functioning better, even though they are not completely better yet. Most of the remaining clients felt that their condition had not changed noticeably one way or another (i.e. either positively or negatively).

Some clients said they have experienced some negative changes or impacts due to their involvement in NVC programs. To be clear, these negative impacts were related to their experience applying for programs, not to the effect or impact of the program itself. For example, a few said that their transition to civilian life was inhibited by stresses arising from service-related problems (e.g. delays in payments, always having to follow-up, feeling like one is begging for services). A few others who have been through appeal processes explained that this experience had a negative impact on them because it made them feel like they had to prove that they were not crooks out to defraud the government.

Suggestions to Help Transition to Civilian Life



Participants offered a number of suggestions regarding what more VAC could do to assist them in their transition from military to civilian life. Those mentioned frequently are identified by an asterisk. Moreover, some of the suggestions were made earlier in a different context:

- *Provide VAC program information to CF members and reservists well before their release.
- *Allow clients to enter into direct contact with their case managers.
- *Replace the disability award with a disability pension.
- Develop profiles to help CF members become aware of problems they may develop during their career (e.g. hearing loss, joint problems, PTSD).
- Try to ensure that clients remain with the same case manager.
- Hire more case managers so that each one's case load is lighter.
- Make sure military physicians know about NVC programs so that they can inform veterans about all of the medical information and records they might need.
- Hire more staff, including veterans who understand the types of problems faced by their companions.
- Include veterans on appeals boards
- Provide a list of lawyers/advocates who help or specialize in helping veterans.
- Have seminars/workshops for CF members provided by veterans.
- Keep all disability claims as active/working files so that information/documentation can be added if it becomes available.
- Make application forms as simple as possible.
- Ensure that releasing CF members are informed of all VAC programs.



Recognition

This section reports on issues related to recognition of veterans' service to Canada.

VAC Programs & Services Seen as Recognition of Service

Nearly all participants pointed to the range of VAC programs and services as an example of what VAC does to recognize veterans' service to Canada. Apart from these concrete examples, clients had difficulty articulating in a general way what VAC does in this regard. Some observed that VAC has begun to recognize that the profile of the CF veteran differs from the profile of the traditional veteran. This includes recognition of the impact of mental/psychological conditions, such as PTSD, and recognition that veterans have families and that the family dimension is an important part of life both during and after a career in the CF. Finally, a few said that VAC recognizes that veterans need help in their transition from military to civilian life.

Many Suggest Disability Pensions & Increasing Benefits to Recognize Veterans

Many veterans were uncomfortable trying to think of additional ways for VAC to recognize their service, with some adding that they are not looking for recognition. The suggestions made most often in terms of additional recognition of veterans' service to Canada were to re-institute disability pensions and to increase the amount of benefits provided. Some added that replacing the disability pension with the lump-sum disability award is a way of divesting oneself of responsibility for veterans by giving them a "golden handshake".

Beyond these specific suggestions, the only suggestion made with any frequency was general in nature and involved making it as easy as possible for veterans to apply for and access benefits and services.

Suggestions made less often included the following:

- Institute a 'hire a veteran' program to make employers aware of the skills veterans bring to a job.
- Ensure veterans have priority for federal government jobs for which they are qualified.
- Include veterans on appeals committees.
- Ensure families of CF members killed in action or seriously injured are adequately provided for.
- Provide free university education to the children of veterans who cannot work or who are killed while in the service.
- Create a national veterans cemetery in Ottawa and provide a funeral free of charge for those veterans who served 25 years or more.
- Inform veterans of everything they are entitled to (i.e. do not make them look for it).



- Ensure periodic check-ins with all veterans to see how they are managing (i.e. do not wait for Veterans to contact VAC).
- Provide all veterans with an ID that entitles them to certain privileges (e.g. discount at movies).



Recognition of Veterans Seen to Imply Respect & Dignity

Asked what they think constitutes recognition of veterans for their service to Canada, nearly all participants said it involves treating them with dignity and respect. Many added that this does not imply giving them special treatment, but that it does imply treating them in a certain way. For example, it was routinely suggested that it involves showing them respect when they apply for disability benefits and/or not making them feel like criminals when they apply for them. A number of participants said recognizing veterans means being entirely proactive with them. This means checking in on them before they come to you and volunteering information instead of waiting for them to ask questions.

Members of CF & Reserves Seen as Having Similar Sense of Recognition

Participants felt that there was no significant difference in terms of the perceptions of recognition held by members of the Reserves and members of the Regular Forces. It is worth recalling in this regard that a number of participants have served in both. It was routinely volunteered that both serve their country and are prepared to do what they are told to do in this regard. Some observed that reservists used to be referred to in a derogatory way by CF members as 'weekend warriors', but that this has nothing to do with reservists' own understanding of recognition.

No Consensus on Whether Programs Help Integrate Veterans into Community

Participants tended to be divided about the extent to which VAC programs contribute to the participation or integration of veterans in their communities. Some felt that this was definitely the case, some were unsure, and some did not think so or felt that the impact was limited. Those who felt VAC programs do contribute to this pointed to their own experience, explaining how the programs they have used have helped them adapt to the rhythm and rules of civilian life and lead productive, meaningful lives. For example, some explained that psychological counselling has helped them develop social skills that have made it easier for them to meet people. Others explained that the rehabilitation program has allowed them to return to school, which in turn is helping prepare them for work in the civilian world. Finally, a few explained that the Job Placement Program has helped them develop skills necessary to integrate into the civilian job market.

Those who did not agree that this was the case, or who felt that VAC programs only helped integrate them in a minimal way also pointed to their own experience. They explained that what they need to complete or achieve their integration into civilian life are skills civilians take for granted, such as how to find a doctor, a plumber, or an electrician, or which brand of detergent to buy. They made it clear that this was not a criticism of VAC programs, which have helped them, but that what they need is more rudimentary than what VAC provides (or perhaps can provide).



Finally, some explained that some of the things that have helped them integrate into civilian life are skills they developed in the military. For example, some participants said that they have taken up coaching of sports teams and that this has helped their integration into their community. However, the skills that have allowed them to do this are skills developed in the military (e.g. discipline, teamwork).

Participants provided mixed assessments of their own integration into civilian life. Some felt that they were fully integrated or integrated for the most part, some felt that they were well on their way, and some felt that they still had a ways to go.



Veterans Who Received a Transition Interview



Background/Contextual Information

This section provides background information about the VAC clients who participated in this aspect of the research (i.e. veterans who underwent a transition interview around the time they obtained their discharge from the CF).

Service in the CF

Most participants served in the CF for at least 20 years. Among the few who served less than this, one served for 13 years, one for six years, and one for eight months. All the participants had served either in the army or the air force, with few having served in both. Most participants said they left the CF in 2008 or 2009. A couple volunteered that they are currently in the Reserves.

Transition Interview

All participants said they first found out about their transition interview through the Integrated Personnel Support Centre (IPSC) of the Canadian Forces, or more specifically through the Release Section of the IPSC (some identified this by name, while others did not). While participants did not recall the precise moment they found out about the interview, they all said it was soon after they had given notice.

All participants were still CF members when their interview took place, and most said it occurred approximately one month prior to their release. A few recalled it taking place approximately two weeks before their release, and a couple thought it occurred about 6-8 weeks prior to their release. While they all felt the timing of the interview was appropriate, a few felt it might have been better to have it a month or so after their release because there was so much going on at that time and they were very busy dealing with it (i.e. they had many things to do in preparation for their release, so this made it hard to focus on things that were not essential).

Most participants are married, but only one was accompanied by a spouse at the interview. A few of those who did not bring their spouse said they did not know this was an option. In addition, one explained that they live far from the base and that the timing of the interview was not convenient for his spouse, one said his spouse had another appointment, and one explained that his spouse is also a member of the CF and decided to wait until her own transition interview.

All interviews were conducted in person, and most said the interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. A few said it lasted longer (45 minutes to an hour), and a few recalled it lasting no more than 15-20 minutes. One participant explained that the interview lasted

one hour because he asked a number of questions. Overall, participants were generally satisfied with the length of the transition interview, not wanting it to be much longer than half an hour, though a few suggested that it should last at least an hour.

In addition to their transition interview, most attended a DND Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN) workshop. Other than this, however, participants did not recall taking part in any other activities at that time to help in their transition to civilian life.



Outreach Activities

This section provides more detailed feedback about participants' transition interviews and their perceptions of the interview, including the extent to which it facilitated access to NVC programs and services.

Purpose of Interview Explained at Start of Session, But Not Before

All participants indicated that the purpose of the transition interview was explained to them in general terms at the beginning of the interview. Descriptions of what they were told were very similar. According to participants, they were told that the interview was designed to inform them about the VAC programs and services that are available to veterans, as well as to help orient them in terms of knowing where to go and who to talk to when something is needed.

Probing revealed that none of the participants knew about the purpose of the interview in advance of the session. They were informed about the interview but not about its purpose, with a few specifying that they simply saw it as something they needed to do as part of their release from the CF. All participants felt it would have been useful to know the purpose of the interview in advance because it would have allowed them to prepare some questions. When participants in one group were asked whether they had asked about the purpose of the interview when they were informed of it, they said they had not. One of them explained that as members of the CF, they are not in the habit of asking questions and that when they are told to do something they do it.

Transition Interview Described as Useful, Even if Not Personally Relevant

Participants described the TI as a useful service in terms of informing them about the programs and services available and providing useful information about them. That said, a few added that they were already aware of VAC programs and services (mainly through the SCAN workshop). However, while useful in a general way, most participants did not tend to consider it personally useful or relevant in terms of identifying or discussing specific needs or issues relevant to their own transition from military to civilian life.

In explaining why it was not personally useful, a few explained that they had transitioned from the CF to the Reserves so they were not actually transitioning from military to civilian life. Consequently, they did not need to address issues related to the transition from military to civilian life. A few others explained that, at least at first glance, none of the programs seemed to apply to them. Finally, one participant explained that he already had specific job-related plans and had only served in the CF for eight months. Consequently, he did not need help transitioning to civilian life since he felt he had never really left it.

A few participants did feel that the TI was personally useful because it directed them to services designed to address specific needs. As well, a few participants re-iterated that it would have been more useful if they had known the purpose of the interview in advance of the meeting.

Most Describe TI as Providing General Information, Not Referrals/Direction

Most participants described their transition interview as providing them with general information about VAC programs and services rather than guiding or referring them to specific services. As such, they felt unable to comment on the appropriateness of the referrals. However, most of them said they acted on information received through the interview by looking into programs in more detail and, in some cases, applying for them. For the most part, those who said they did not act on the information they received during their interview had either gone from the CF into the Reserves or went directly into a civilian job that was waiting for them.

The participants who said they were referred to specific services did describe the referrals as appropriate. This includes being referred to the Veterans Independence Program, the Job Placement Program, and the disability award.

Subsequent Information About Programs Much More Detailed

While no one described the information obtained after their TI as inconsistent with what they were told during their interview, participants observed that the information obtained afterwards was much more detailed. They explained that the information obtained during their TI was very general, and that only when trying to access programs themselves or information about them did the details emerge. This was not intended as a criticism of information received during their TI, with a few adding that given the short duration of the latter it could only provide very general information.

While no one said that the information from their interview generated any false expectations, some did say that the process of applying for programs was longer and more complicated than they had expected.

Generally Positive First Impression of VAC Generated by TI

As a result of their transition interview, most said they formed a generally positive first impression of VAC. They explained that the interview gave them the impression that VAC was there to help, wanted to help, or wanted to let them know that it was there if they



needed help. Others said they formed no impression of the department or a neutral one. A few explained that they simply had the feeling that they were passing from one department (i.e. DND) to another (i.e. VAC), and that this was VAC's way of introducing itself.

TI Itself Generates No Sense of Recognition, Though Existence of Programs Does

The experience of the transition interview, in and of itself, did not give participants the sense that they were being recognized for their service to Canada, except insofar as it brought to their attention programs and services for veterans. In other words, they do feel recognized to the extent that they do not feel abandoned as they leave the CF, but know that there is another department responsible for them, which has programs and services for them.

Suggestions to Improve Transition Interview

The suggestion offered most often for improving the transition interview was to inform releasing CF members of the purpose of the interview in advance. Another frequently-identified suggestion was to inform releasing CF members about VAC programs prior to their interview. The rationale underpinning both suggestions was that this would allow participants to prepare for the interview by knowing its purpose and by going into it with a basic awareness of VAC programs. This would allow them to ask relevant questions.

Other suggestions included the following, each of which was made by at least a few participants:

- Turn the transition interview into a day-long workshop, with the interview itself as part of the workshop (e.g. perhaps the final element). This would allow releasing CF members to be better informed about VAC programs and services.
- Schedule the transition interview after rather than prior to release (perhaps one month after release). The reason was that the period surrounding the release is very busy and hectic, and releasing CF members will have their minds on many things and may not be able to focus on the TI.
- Conduct follow-ups with veterans 6-12 months after the interview. This suggestion is discussed in greater detail below because participants were asked about it explicitly.
- Make the transition interview longer (at least one hour).
- Be proactive with information during the interview. It was observed that CF members are not trained to ask questions but to follow orders. Consequently, they should be given as much information as possible since they might not ask for it.

Consensus That VAC Should Follow-Up With Releasing CF Members/Reservists

As noted, some participants suggested that one way to improve the transition interview process was for VAC to schedule a follow-up with veterans 6-12 months after the interview. When asked explicitly if this should be done, there was a consensus among group participants that this would be a good idea and that it should take the form of another one-on-one interview. In explaining why they thought it would be a good idea, participants offered the following reasons:

- The TI takes place at a time when there is so much going on (i.e. when one is released from the CF), which made it hard to focus on the issues it addresses. There was a general impression that veterans would be better able to concentrate on issues and questions related to their transition once it had started to take place and the dust had settled a little
- There was also a general sense that once releasing CF members will have been out of the CF for a while, they will have a better idea or a more palpable sense of their own transition needs, as well as issues and difficulties related to their transition. Therefore, this would be an appropriate time to discuss these issues with them.
- Some felt that CF members will have had time to follow-up on program information obtained during their TI and since they will be better informed, they will be able to ask more informed questions about these programs, including problems they may have had trying to access them.
- Finally, it was suggested that personal circumstances may have changed in the months following the TI and that there may be new or different issues to address that were non-existent at the time of the interview. Specifically, it was suggested that some veterans may be depressed and stressed and therefore less likely to contact VAC themselves. Therefore, it was felt that the department should take the initiative and contact them.



All Were Aware of NVC, Mainly Due to TI

All participants said they were aware of the New Veterans Charter, though most said they only heard about it during their transition interview. A few had heard about it prior to this, through word-of-mouth. Familiarity with the NVC was very general, amounting to awareness that it includes programs and services that target veterans. A few were under the impression that the Veterans Independence Program is part of the NVC.

All participants were familiar with the NVC brochure they were shown, and most had received it or similar material during their TI. They also indicated that all the programs in the brochure were brought to their attention during their TI. There was a consensus that the information in the brochure is consistent with information received during their TI, with most repeating that they received the brochure during their interview.

Accessing Benefits Described as Harder Than Expected

When it came to the extent to which the information in the brochure is consistent with information obtained after their TI and their experience with the programs, participants reiterated what they had said earlier regarding consistency of information. Once again, they observed that the information obtained afterwards and/or when trying to access programs was much more detailed, and that the details emerge only as one tries to access the programs.

Those who had accessed or tried to access programs generally described the process as more difficult and longer than they expected, adding that this was not something they expected or anticipated. This was especially the case for those who accessed or tried to access disability benefits. Some volunteered that they have launched appeals regarding disability benefits.

Suggestions for Effective & Efficient Provision of Program Information

In terms of the most effective way for VAC to communicate about its programs, participants tended to focus on the timing of the information, suggesting that information be provided earlier, while people are still in the CF so that they can better act on some of the medical requirements and can come to the TI more informed and therefore ask better questions. Other suggestions included informing releasing CF members about all VAC programs, not just NVC programs, informing them about all the paperwork, documentation, and records they may need prior to their release, turning the transition interview into an all-day seminar/workshop (as discussed above), and having a follow-up with veterans 6-12 months later (as discussed above).



Perception of Transition Needs

This section reports on participants' perceptions of needs related to the transition from military to civilian life.

Basic Lifestyle Issues – Most Important in Terms of Transition Needs

When participants think of the transition from military to civilian life, they tend to consider lifestyle issues as the most important types of issues that need to be addressed. There was general agreement that anyone leaving the CF/Reserves after even a few years service needs help with certain lifestyle changes. More specifically, it was observed that life in the CF/Reserves is regimented, and certain things can be taken for granted as taken care of. For example, in the CF/Reserves one does not have to worry about finding services such as family physicians and dentists. However, when returning to civilian life these are responsibilities that need to be taken on, despite being unfamiliar with them.

This was particularly emphasized in Cold Lake, with a focus on medical issues ad where the situation is exacerbated by a shortage of doctors. Almost every participant there had trouble finding a family doctor, and many have not yet done so. Moreover, many of the doctors that are available refuse to take former CF members because of the heavy paperwork involved, or charge extra for it. For example, one participant was told that VAC-related paperwork would cost \$400-500.

While there also tended to be agreement that employment-related issues were important, there was a sense that this depended on how long one had been in the CF/Reserves. For example, it was suggested that people leaving the CF after 25 years of service with a full pension are much less likely to want or need help finding a job than those leaving after 5 years who still has a number of work years ahead of them.

Finally, some participants said that an important issue is knowing what one needs to take along when one leaves the military. A few participants added that this is something they became aware of in retrospect (i.e. after leaving the CF) and not something they could have anticipated. Specifically, these participants observed that releasing CF members and reservists need a good understanding of the types of documents and records they will need or may need to facilitate their transition to civilian life. The emphasis here was on medical records and documentation needed when applying for a disability benefit.

Current Employment Status

As a preface to discussing employment-related needs and issues, participants were asked about their current employment status. Most of them said they are currently employed



(half are employed full-time, a couple part-time, and one is self-employed). Among those that are not employed, a couple are studying or back at school, and a couple are unemployed but not looking for work due to disabilities.

Employment-Related Goals and Challenges

When it came to their own employment-related goals, participants were most likely to assign importance to job stability, followed by salary. Some also said one of their main goals was to find something different from what they did in the military. This included a desire to be one's own boss, to have more freedom in terms of work schedule, to take on less responsibility, and to have a better balance between work and family life. When discussing employment-related goals, a few participants re-iterated that priorities can vary depending on how long one had been in the CF/Reserves. For example, someone leaving the CF after 25 years with a pension might place less emphasis on job stability and salary and more on lifestyle issues (e.g. finding part-time job leaving them more time for leisure).

This point was emphasized again in the discussion of current employment-related challenges, with participants emphasizing that challenges often depend on when and why one leaves the CF/Reserves. For example, challenges emphasized by participants who spent over 20 years in the CF and have a pension tended to have to do with finding a job that accommodates certain lifestyle choices (e.g. wanting leisure time, wanting to spend more time with family, wanting only part-time work). On the other hand, those who served less time in the CF were more likely to emphasize job stability and salary.

Actually finding a job was identified as a challenge by two participants, and both linked this to the reasons they left the CF. Specifically, both were medically released from the CF and said finding a job is a challenge because employers seem to be apprehensive about hiring someone released from the CF for medical reasons.

Only a few participants identified services or supports that would be useful in helping them address these challenges. These included general assistance finding work for medically releasing members of the CF/Reserves, assistance setting up a new business (e.g. grants, help getting loans), and general letters of introduction for potential employers.

Few Have Used Job-Related Programs/Services Since Leaving CF/Reserves

Only a few participants said they have used any job-related programs or services since their release. Specifically, one obtained his Class 1 driving license, one obtained assistance with CV preparation, and one took a course in small engine repair. Asked specifically if they had applied for the Job Placement Program (JPP), all of the participants



said no. Some explained that they did not need to use the program, either because they already had a job waiting for them following their release, or because they had connections that were helping them find a job. Two participants explained that since they went from the CF to the Reserves, they did not need to use the program yet. One participant said he thought that the JPP was only for medically releasing members of the CF/Reserves.

Additional Assistance VAC Could Provide in Transition from Military to Civilian Life

When it came to additional assistance from VAC to help the transition from military to civilian life, the most frequently made suggestion was that VAC become involved as early as possible, so that CF members become aware of and familiar with programs and services early on (up to two years before their release). It was observed that at present, CF members/reservists pass in a relatively cut and dry way from one department to another (i.e. when in the CF/Reserves they are under the auspices of DND, and as soon as they are out, they are under the auspices of VAC). It was suggested that there should be a more fluid, less sudden transition.

Other suggestions included the following:

- Tailor programs and services as much as possible. For example, the Job Placement Program is much more important for a young person coming out of the CF after a few years who stills has to work for a number of years than for someone coming out with a full pension.
- Provide flexibility on VAC program deadlines (or doing away with the deadlines), and help change the rules so that veterans can collect Employment Insurance.
- Start a 'hire a veteran program' with employers.
- Provide assistance in accessing grants/financing to open a business.
- Help veterans find/secure doctors. This includes convincing doctors to help with VAC paperwork.
- Allow veterans to access DND doctors for six months following their release from the CF
- Allow veterans to have routine medicals with VAC doctors, and have VAC help fill out Disability Award paperwork.





Participants in Job Placement Program



Background/Contextual Information

This section provides background information about the VAC clients who participated in one or more aspects of the Job Placement Program (JPP).

Service in the CF

Nearly half the participants served in the CF for at least 20 years, and most of the rest served between 15-20 years. Those who served less than this served between 4-6 years in the CF. There was a good mix of participants by branch of the CF served in, with almost equal numbers having served in each of the three elements (i.e. army, air force, navy). All participants left the CF between 2008 and 2009.

Participation in Job Placement Program

All participants took the Job Search and Transition Workshop component of the Job Placement Program. Half said they used Career Counselling Services, and no one, to date, has used Job Finding Assistance. In explaining why they have not taken other components of the JPP, most pointed to the fact that they have found employment. A few said they are back in school, and a couple said that they intend to use the Career Counselling Services (the one service they had not used yet). Everyone accessed JPP services while still serving in the CF.

Awareness of NVC & Related Programs/Services

Everyone had heard of the New Veterans Charter (NVC), but they were familiar with it in a very general way. They were all aware that it offers a range of programs to veterans, including the JPP. Some added that they first became aware of the NVC through the JPP. One participant described the NVC as shifting from disability pensions to a lump-sum disability award, while another described it as providing more support to veterans to deal with issues related to operational stress.

As noted above, all participants knew that the JPP is part of the NVC. When it came to awareness of other programs, all said they had heard of the disability award and at least half said they had heard of the other NVC programs. To date, no one has used any of the other NVC programs. One participant has used the Veterans Independence Program.



Outreach Activities

This section reports on information and communications issues related to the Job Placement Program.

Participants Learned About JPP Through Scan Seminar or PSO

Participants found out about the JPP either during their SCAN seminar or through their Personnel Selection Office (PSO). Everyone described the information they received about the JPP as clear, complete, accurate, and timely. That said, a few participants offered qualifications regarding accuracy and timeliness.

In terms of accuracy, one participant described the name of the program as slightly misleading since it does not actually place you in a job. Another said she had expected more one-on-one sessions with counsellors. She explained that there were only two career counsellors in the program, which severely limited the number of one-on-one sessions. In terms of timeliness, nearly half the participants felt it would have been better to receive information earlier than they did, though none felt that they were adversely affected by not having gotten information earlier. In explaining why receiving information earlier would have been helpful, they observed that having some idea of the content of the program would have allowed them to prepare questions in advance or think of issues they might want to address.

Information About JPP Obtained Through Contractor's Website & SCAN Seminar

All participants said they obtained details of the JPP through the contractor's website (i.e. Right Management). Some also said they obtained general information prior to going to the website through a SCAN seminar. No one experienced any problems obtaining information about the program and its components, or registering for the program online. Everyone expressed satisfaction with service received in relation to the program, whether it be in relation to knowledge of the program and its elements, courtesy or helpfulness or staff, or timely response to questions.

Few Suggestions to Improve Outreach Regarding Job Placement Program

Most participants had no suggestions to help VAC ensure that it provides information about its programs as effectively and efficiently as possible. The suggestions made were offered by no more than a few participants and included the following: make sure information gets out to individuals leaving the CF as early as possible before their release, and provide information through the medium of information sessions/professional development workshops offered by VAC personnel.



No One Referred to Other Employment-Related Programs

At the time they were getting information about the Job Placement Program, none of the participants were informed about or referred to employment-related programs offered by other departments of the Government of Canada or provincial governments. Moreover, only a few said that they have used job-related programs or services other than those provided by VAC since their release. These included Emploi Québec, and the posting of CVs on the website www.hirecanadianmilitary.com.

Application Process for Job Placement Program

This section reports on the application process for the Job Placement Program.

Application Process for JPP Described as Easy & Timely

Participants expressed overall satisfaction with the application process for the Job Placement Program. They all applied for the program online, and no one experienced any difficulties completing the application process. They all described the application form as clear and easy to understand, and no one required any assistance or support during the application process. In addition, everyone was satisfied with the amount of time they had to wait after submitting the application to learn about whether or not it was accepted.

All had applied for the program within two years of their release from the CF, and no one had any suggestions on how the application process could be improved.



Employment Goals and Status

This section reports on participants' employment-related goals and their current employment status.

Job-Stability – Main Employment-Related Goals

When participants thought of their transition from the military to the civilian labour force, they tended to identify various employment or career-related goals. However, the one identified most often was job stability, with a few adding that this is something they took for granted in the CF. Other employment-related goals identified routinely included flexibility in work hours, the ability to develop new skills/do something different, a good salary, a good balance between work and family life, and the ability to use/transfer existing skills. One participant identified the ability to live in a specific community as an important goal, explaining that he had just purchased a house. Another identified a good pension as his main employment-related goal. Participants who served less than 20 years in the CF were most likely to emphasize the importance of job stability and a good salary.

Most Participants are Currently Employed

Most of the participants are currently employed, either full-time or part-time. Most of the rest are looking for employment, and a couple are currently in school/training. All employed participants said they obtained their current job within six months of leaving the CF. Some said they obtained it within weeks of leaving, explaining that they had jobs waiting for them when they released from the CF because of connections/networks.

Employed participants expressed general satisfaction with their current jobs, with most explaining that it is in line with their career goals (or at least not at odds with them). A few said that the current job is not in line with their career goals, but that they are happy doing it until they find something more compatible with their aspirations. All employed participants said that their current position allows them to use elements of their skills, training, and education even though some are not working in their field of training or expertise. All but one of those not working in their field explained that they do not want to. In other words, they are looking to do something different from what they did in the CF.

All but one of the employed participants said their current job meets their salary expectations, even though no one described their current salary as comparable to the income they earned at the time they were released from the Forces. Some explained that they have a CF pension that provides them with a good source of income so that they are not looking for a salary compatible with their salary when they left the CF.

Those who are unemployed and looking for work have had employment since releasing from the CF, but are looking for jobs more compatible with their career aspirations. All but one of these think they will be able to find a job in line with these aspirations. One participant thinks that this depends on his ability to bring his work skills up to par. He explained that in Quebec, military work skills are not considered equivalent to those acquired in the civilian labour force (i.e. they are not recognized as such). Those who are unemployed and not looking for work are currently in school/training.



Satisfaction with and Impact of Job Placement Program

This section reports on participant experience with the Job Placement Program, including their perceptions of its impact in terms of helping them make the transition to the civilian labour force.

Most Took JPP Without Definite or Clear Expectations

Most participants in the JPP said they went into the program with no definite or clear expectations. Some said they took the first component of the program because they were advised to take it. In other words, they were told that it would be helpful. Some others said that while they were hoping to receive assistance or support, they had no definite expectations because they did not really know what kind of assistance they needed until they began the program. For example, one participant said she did not know that she needed help with resumé preparation until she learned through the program what employers are looking for in a resumé.

Those who did go into the program with expectations were looking for assistance in resumé preparation, job search skills, interview skills, and help in creating networks and getting one's foot in the door when it comes to job opportunities.

JPP Meets Most Expectations

With one exception, participants who went into the JPP with definite expectations said all their expectations were met. One participant felt that all but one of her expectations was met. Specifically, she had expected more one-on-one sessions with career counsellors. She explained that there were only two career counsellors available when she took the program and that this limited the amount of time that could be devoted to one-on-one training.

For their part, participants who went into the program with no definite expectations said they were glad that they took it. Some explained that it was not until the program began that they became aware that they would need help in getting themselves up-to-speed in terms of job-related and employment search skills.

All Participants Satisfied with JPP

All participants expressed satisfaction with the JPP, with many saying they were *very* satisfied with the program. The most frequently-identified strengths, and the areas participants were most pleased with, included resumé writing/preparation and preparing for a job interview. Regarding the latter, one participant explained that having spent her

entire professional career in the CF she did not even know how one should dress for a job interview, so this component was particularly useful. Some also described the program as very good in terms of identifying transferable skills (i.e. career skills that could be transferred to a new civilian career). Finally, a few said the program was very good in helping develop job search skills.

Only a few participants identified what they felt were weaknesses with the program, and with one exception these weaknesses were identified by individuals. Some participants felt that the program should include more job-related scenarios and role playing in order to help them prepare for a real-life job interview. This includes holding mock job interviews and/or watching videos of job interviews and discussing them afterwards. Weaknesses identified by individuals included limited one-on-one interaction with career counsellors, limited time in relation to the number of topics to cover, and not enough tailoring of instruction. The participant who said that the program did not provide enough tailored instruction explained that the program seems a little too tailored to finding jobs in white collar or 'higher-level-type' jobs. He felt that there needs to be more focus on those looking for employment in the skilled trades. In short, he felt that while the program is good, it tends to take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to career transition goals.

Consensus That JPP Identifies & Utilizes Existing Skills

There was a consensus among participants that the JPP helped identify and utilize their existing skills, including specialized military career skills that could easily be transferred to a new civilian career. Moreover, in explaining why they all pointed to the same thing. They explained that the part of the program dedicated to resumé preparation helps them translate their military skills into civilian equivalents or civilian language. Some added that this was the most valuable part of the segment on resumé preparation. In addition to this, some participants said the program helped them identify and highlight important general skills sought by employers, which are taken for granted in the military (e.g. loyalty, devotion, team work, punctuality, discipline).

JPP Helps Increase Confidence & Bring Job-Related Skills Up-to-date

In terms of outcomes or impact, all participants expressed satisfaction with the Job Placement Program. In explaining why, they routinely observed that it helped bring their job-related skills up-to-date and, in so doing, increased their confidence in their skills. Some went further, observing that the JPP gave them skills they never had before because they had never actually gone through a job interview or written a resumé before.

Nearly all the employed participants said the JPP helped them find their current job, at last to some extent. Those who did not explained they got their job through connections, but added that they are certain that the skills acquired through the JPP will be very useful



should they need to look for a new job. For their part, unemployed participants felt that their participation in the program has improved their chances of finding a job in line with their employment goals. In explaining why, they observed that the JPP helped them identify and promote the skills they have that are in line with these goals.

Many Would Have Liked to Know About JPP Earlier

Although no one felt that the JPP would have been more beneficial to them if they had accessed it earlier, many (almost half) nonetheless would have liked to know about it earlier. They explained that learning about the program earlier would have allowed them to prepare questions in advance or think of issues they might want to address in the program.

All but two participants knew that they had up to two years from the time of their release to apply for services provided through the Job Placement Program. While all felt that the component(s) of the program they have not used could potentially be beneficial to them, most do not plan to use them. None of the employed participants plan to do so because they now have jobs. Among the unemployed, a few said they are considering taking one or both of the components of the program they have not taken.



Suggestions for Additional Services to Assist Transition to Civilian Life

Most suggestions regarding additional services or support VAC could provide to help the transition from a military to a civilian career related to the JPP itself. These suggestions were made by individuals or no more than few participants and included the following:

- Making the Job Search and Transition Workshop a little longer (e.g. an additional day or half day).
- Having more role playing/scenarios (e.g. mock interviews), and/or showing tapes of job interviews.
- Tailoring the sessions to address different needs/challenges. For example, it was suggested that the work-related needs/challenges of someone in their 50s with a CF pension are not the same as someone in their 30s with no pension.
- Having more one-on-one sessions with career counsellors.

Beyond this (i.e. looking beyond the JPP itself), it was suggested that VAC could organize job fairs specifically for releasing CF members, including workshops with potential employers, provide information on other government job-related programs, develop a mentoring or job shadowing program, and follow up with releasing CF members a year or so after their participation in the JPP to see how they are doing.



Recognition

This section reports on issues related to recognition of veterans' service to Canada.

VAC Programs & Services Seen as Recognition of Service

Participants pointed to the NVC programs and services, and the JPP in particular, as examples of what VAC does to recognize veterans' service to Canada. Beyond these concrete examples, clients had difficulty articulating what VAC does in this regard.

Participants had also some difficulty articulating what constitutes recognition of veterans for their service to Canada. Those who had a sense of what this involves focused on the issue of transition from military to civilian life. To some, recognition means checking-in on veterans and following-up with them to see how they are doing in terms of their transition to civilian life. Some others felt that recognition means making people, employers in particular, aware that the skills developed in the military continue to be useful in civilian life.

Additional measures to recognize veterans' service and help their transition to civilian life included the following, each of which was identified by at least a few participants:

- Develop a mentorship/job shadowing program
- Develop a "Hire a veteran" program or ad campaign to make employers aware of the types of skills veterans bring to a job.
- Have someone review all releasing CF members' records to see if they qualify for benefits they don't know about.
- Make veterans aware of all VAC programs and services.
- Provide information on what is needed in terms of training/upgrading of skills to make sure their military expertise gains civil recognition. It was explained that in Quebec, military work skills are not considered equivalent to those acquired in the civilian labour force, so veterans need to know how to bring their skills up to par.
- Follow-up with veterans periodically to see how they are managing.

Employers Should Recognize Veterans' Skills, But Not Give Preferential Treatment

Participants were slightly uncomfortable discussing the role employers have to play, if any, in recognizing veterans for their service to Canada. The reason was that suggesting employers have a role to play could be interpreted as suggesting that they should give veterans preferential treatment when it comes to employment. Many participants could not think of any specific role or responsibility for employers, though there was a widespread sense that employers should be aware of veterans as an available and highly-skilled potential source of labour.

Those who think employers have a role to play made a point of stating that they were not advocating special or preferential treatment. In terms of concrete things employers could do, it was suggested by some that there be job fairs or information sessions specifically for veterans and/or releasing CF members, where employers could inform them about their employment-related needs. It was also suggested by some that employers could provide mentorship programs for veterans in partnership with the federal government. The government could help defray the veteran's salary, and at the end of the internship, the employer could decide whether or not to hire the veteran full-time.

