

DISABILITY DECISIONS WAIT TIMES

- The Government is fully committed to the health and well-being of Veterans and their families.
- Since 2015, Veterans Affairs Canada has seen an increase of more than 60% in disability applications, this includes an increase of more than 90% in first applications.
- Veterans Affairs Canada continues to streamline the disability benefits process, simplify the decision-making process for some medical conditions, and work with its partners to speed up access to service health records.
- It is important to remember that applications are fast tracked for those who are medically at risk or, have an immediate, unmet health need related to their claimed condition.
- We know there is more to be done – that is why we are working hard to change how decisions are made and putting Veterans first.

BACKGROUND - DISABILITY DECISIONS WAIT TIMES

Current State (October 1, 2019):

- Although additional staffing and numerous process improvements have enabled Veterans Affairs Canada to increase the number of disability claims processed, it limited impact on the backlog of disability claims as the number of applications outpaced the increase in capacity.
- In 2018-2019, the overall volume of claims completed by the Department increased by 15%. However, these gains are being outpaced by the number of Veterans applying for disability benefits.
- An increase in awareness campaigns for benefits, services and My VAC Account (online system for clients) appear to be a significant driver for the increase in disability benefit applications.
- In 2018-2019, Veterans Affairs Canada:
 - Used a first-in first-out model, adjudicating the oldest claims first
 - Made more than 41,000 disability benefit decisions
 - Processed more than 40% of initial disability applications through the streamlined decision-making model.
 - Modified several medical questionnaires to minimize the administrative burden on health professionals.
- As of September 2019, wait times were: 39.5 weeks for first applications, 16 weeks for reassessments and 21.5 weeks for departmental reviews.
- As of September 2019, approximately 21% of the overall pending disability applications were from still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces.
- As of September 2019, there were 6,172 applications that were not ready for a decision. This means applications where we are waiting to receive supporting documents such as: proof of identity, information from the applicant's doctor (e.g. confirmed diagnosis, X-ray reports), etc. There were 38,492 applications ready and waiting for a VAC decision, of which 21,336 were waiting more than our 16-week service standard (considered backlog). The total number of pending applications was 44,664.

Veterans Affairs Canada Action:

- Veterans Affairs Canada continues to streamline the disability benefits process, simplify the decision-making process for some medical conditions, and work with its partners to speed up access to service health records.
- In 2018-19, we hired new staff to process disability applications. However, it takes time for decision-makers to gain proficiency and they are still learning.

- Veterans Affairs Canada is piloting a Veteran Benefit Team structure that groups all the resources required to process a disability application from beginning to end into one team. This reduces the duplication of effort, minimizes applicant and staff frustration and decreases delays. Results from September 2018 to September 2019:
 - The average turn-around time for first applications was 15 weeks from Service Standard Start Date (i.e., the date the Department receives all requested information from a client) compared to 39 weeks for applications processed outside this model.
 - Full implementation of this structure is expected by March 2020.