



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

EVALUATION OF COMMEMORATIVE BENEFITS AND SERVICES

Funeral and Burial Program
Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program
Honours and Awards

March 2017

Audit and Evaluation Division

Canada 

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Executive Summary

The Evaluation of Commemorative Benefits and Services was conducted in accordance with Veterans Affairs Canada's (VAC) approved Multi-Year Risk-Based Evaluation Plan 2012-17 and with the directive and standards specified in Treasury Board of Canada's 2009 Policy on Evaluation.

The evaluation covered three programs: Funeral and Burial, Cemetery and Grave Maintenance, and Honours and Awards. While the programs have differing objectives, they are all intended to reaffirm Canada's commitment to remember the sacrifices of the fallen, the Veterans, those who served our country on the home front, and those who served and will continue to serve our nation in the cause of peace throughout the world.

The evaluation findings and conclusions are based on the analysis of multiple lines of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

All five core issues, as identified by Treasury Board, were examined with largely positive results. For example, all three programs remain relevant though demonstrating a continued need and aligning with Government of Canada priorities and federal roles and responsibilities.

The evaluation team identified some shortfalls and areas for improvement in relation to:

- Program performance, particularly for the achievement of the immediate outcomes associated with both the Funeral and Burial and Cemetery and Grave Maintenance programs and the intermediate outcome for the Funeral and Burial program.
- Efficiency, as it relates to Funeral and Burial financial assistance and Memorial Cross issuance to Veterans estates eligible through a Matter-of-Right (service-related death) decision.

The evaluation resulted in the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that measures be implemented to increase access to funeral and burial financial assistance for:

- Veterans receiving VAC benefits and/or services for low income and/or homelessness (Means Tested); and
- Single/Widowed Veterans and Veterans in receipt of disability benefits for certain conditions (Matter-of-Right).

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the Director General of Commemoration put measures in place to reduce the backlog of outstanding Veteran grave maintenance, with an increased focus on maintenance items such as inscription legibility, grave marker replacements and foundation repairs.

Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that measures be implemented to ensure that the estates of Veterans whose death has been deemed related to service receive the benefits (funeral and burial financial assistance) and recognition (Memorial Cross) to which they are entitled, in a timely manner.

1.0 Introduction

The *Government of Canada Remembrance Policy*¹ defines remembrance as honouring and commemorating the sacrifices, achievements and legacy of those who served in Government of Canada sanctioned wars, conflicts, peacekeeping and aid missions, in both military and civilian capacities. The objective of the policy is to reaffirm that Canada will always remember the contributions and sacrifices of the fallen, the Veterans, those who served our country on the home front, and those who served and will continue to serve our nation in the cause of peace throughout the world. Primary responsibility for implementing the *Government of Canada Policy on Remembrance* resides with the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) contributes to achieving these commemorative responsibilities through its Canada Remembers Program.²

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with VAC's Multi-Year Risk-Based Evaluation Plan 2015-20. It focuses on three programs within the Canada Remembers Program which provides commemorative benefits and services to Veterans and Veterans' estates. The evaluated programs are: Funeral and Burial Program, Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program and Honours and Awards Program³ (herein called "the Program" or "the Programs").

The Programs were evaluated as a group for a number of reasons: their focus is complementary, they share stakeholders and beneficiaries, and they have the same ultimate outcome. The evaluation examined the relevance, performance, efficiency, and economy of the Programs and was conducted in accordance with Treasury Board policy requirements and guidance.

This report provides an introduction to the Programs, evaluation scope, and methodology. Core evaluation questions are discussed with results identified by program-specific sub-headings where appropriate.

¹ Government of Canada Remembrance Policy. Canada Remembers: Canadian Service in Wartime and Peace Actions.

² Through the Canada Remembers Program, Veterans Affairs Canada works to ensure that Canadians remember and demonstrate their recognition of all who served in Canada's efforts during war, military conflict and peace. Veterans Affairs Canada. (2016). *Budget 2016*, Commemoration.

³ The Honours and Awards Program is a component within subprogram 2.1.2. Veterans Affairs Canada. *2.0 Institutional Functions*, Programs.

1.1 Overview of Programs

1.1.1 Funeral and Burial Program

The Funeral and Burial Program provides financial assistance toward funeral, burial, and grave marking expenses of eligible Veterans to recognize their service to Canada. Under the *Veterans Burial Regulations, 2005*, assistance is available for war service (WS) Veterans (Veterans of the Korean War and both World Wars) and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veterans (Veterans with service post-Korean War) whose deaths were service-related or whose estates do not have sufficient funds for a dignified funeral, burial, and grave marking. The Funeral and Burial Program is administered, on behalf of VAC, by the Last Post Fund Corporation, an independent, non-profit organization. The Last Post Fund's mission is to ensure that no Veteran is denied a dignified funeral and burial as well as a military gravestone due to insufficient funds at time of death.⁴

The overall number of Funeral and Burial Program recipients has decreased slightly from 1,227 in 2012-13 to 1,174 in 2015-16 (a decrease of 4.3%). Forecasts, which now include program enhancements through Budget 2016⁵, indicate that the number of recipients will gradually decline over the next four years. Table 1 shows actual and forecast recipients/expenditures for the Funeral and Burial Program.

Table 1: Funeral and Burial Recipients/Expenditures

Funeral and Burial	Actuals				Forecast			
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Recipients	1,227	1,213	1,186	1,174	1,060	1,030	1,000	970
Expenditures (\$ Millions)	\$5.830	\$7.149	\$7.338	\$7.664	\$7.087	\$7.102	\$7.118	\$7.093

Source: VAC Finance Division

Program Eligibility

In order to be deemed eligible for the Program, service eligibility criteria must be met and an application submitted within one year from the date of death. Service eligible applicants must then meet the criteria under one of the following benefit streams:

- **Matter-of-Right:** When a Veteran's death is related to military service due to a condition for which VAC provided a disability benefit, assistance may be granted as a Matter-of-Right (no Means Testing); or

⁴ Additional information can be found on the Last Post Fund website.

⁵ In March of 2016, the Government of Canada announced through Budget 2016 that VAC would be expanding Funeral and Burial program eligibility to more families of lower-income Veterans by "increasing the estate exemption from approximately \$12,000 to approximately \$35,000 and to apply an annual cost of living adjustment moving forward," Veterans Affairs Canada. (2016). *Budget 2016, Commemoration, Quick Facts: Funeral and Burial Program*.

- **Means Test:** The Last Post Fund completes a financial assessment of the Veteran's estate, which takes into account marital status, number of dependents and net assets.⁶

1.1.2 Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program

The Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program preserves the memory of Canadians who served their country in war and peace, by maintaining graves in perpetuity as symbols of remembrance.⁷ The Program is responsible for:

- Maintaining 110,364 war dead graves in more than 70 countries around the world;
- Maintaining 207,525 Veteran grave markers in Canada and overseas; and
- Managing two departmental cemeteries in Canada (Fort Massey Cemetery in Halifax, NS, and Veterans Cemetery in Esquimalt, BC).

In a joint agreement among partner governments - i.e., Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom - the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) has responsibility for the care and maintenance of war dead graves⁸ in Canada and overseas. Canada contributes 10.7% of the cost of this agreement, approximately \$10 million annually.

Historically, VAC budgets \$1.25 million annually for the maintenance of Veterans graves⁹ and the management of VAC's two departmental cemeteries.

Grave markers provided at the expense of the Government of Canada are inspected to determine the level of maintenance required, from minor maintenance (e.g., cleaning) to major maintenance (e.g., marker replacement/resurfacing).

Program eligibility:

Graves for Canada's war dead and Veterans buried at the expense of the Government of Canada are covered under the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program.

⁶ Additional information can be found on the Last Post Fund website.

⁷ Veterans Affairs Canada. *Veterans Affairs Canada Report of Plans and Priorities 2016-17*, sub-program 2.1.3, p 42.

⁸ The Government of Canada has a responsibility to maintain the graves of Canadian war dead located throughout the world. These graves are the graves of individuals who died during the First and Second World Wars. IBID.

⁹ The Government of Canada is also responsible for the maintenance of graves of Veterans who are buried at the expense of the Government of Canada. These are graves of Veterans who died in service during the Korean War or after, for conditions related to a pension/awarded condition or for those who had low financial means at their time of death. IBID, sub-program 2.1.4, p 43.

1.1.3 Honours and Awards Program

In recognition of the achievements and sacrifices of Canadian Veterans, the Honours and Awards Program provides:

- First issue and replacement war service medals to Veterans and their families;
- Memorial Cross(es) for the loved ones of Veterans whose death was attributed to their service; and
- Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendations¹⁰ for those who have demonstrated exemplary service to Veterans.

On average, VAC provides approximately 380 first issue and 170 replacement war service medals to Veterans and their families annually. Memorial Crosses are issued to the family members of approximately 140 Veterans a year, and Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendations are presented to approximately 90 recipients annually.

Program eligibility:

Eligibility to receive an honour or award varies, as indicated above, based on the specific item requested.

¹⁰ The Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation is awarded annually to individuals who have contributed in an exemplary manner to the care and well-being of Veterans or to the remembrance of the contributions, sacrifices and achievements of Veterans. Veterans Affairs Canada. *Minister's Commendation*.

2.0 Scope and Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the directive and standards specified in Treasury Board of Canada's 2009 Policy on Evaluation¹¹. It covers the time frame from April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2016, and was conducted between April 2016 and January 2017. The evaluation covered three programs: Funeral and Burial, Cemetery and Grave Maintenance, and Honours and Awards.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's 2009 Directive on the Evaluation Function outlines five "core issues" to be addressed in all evaluations of federal programs: continued need, alignment with Government priorities, alignment with federal roles and responsibilities, performance, and efficiency and economy. Table 2 details how the evaluation covered those issues.

Table 2: Evaluation Scope

Relevance
➤ Continued need for all three programs; based on intake, awareness and changes since the last evaluation.
➤ Alignment with Government priorities for all three programs; assessment was calibrated and used relevant work completed in the previous evaluation.
➤ Alignment with federal roles and responsibilities for all three programs; assessment was calibrated and used relevant work completed in the previous evaluation.
Performance
➤ Achievement of outcomes; focusing on the outcomes for the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program and for the Funeral and Burial Program as well as a quality assurance assessment on whether the program is being administered as intended, particularly in relation to Matter-of-Right and Means Testing decisions pertinent to the latter.
Efficiency and Economy
➤ Demonstration of efficiency and economy; focusing on administration of Veteran grave maintenance; efficiencies gained in the administration of the Funeral and Burial Program since the last evaluation; and efficient processing associated with the Funeral and Burial and Honours and Awards Programs.

The Honours and Awards Program is a component of VAC's overall Ceremonies and Events Program; therefore, outcomes and economy associated with the former will be assessed to a greater extent during a 2017-18 evaluation of the latter. Similarly, VAC's Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program forms a part of VAC's broader Memorial and Cemetery Maintenance program; the Memorial portion of this program will be assessed in 2017-18.

¹¹ Government of Canada. (April 2009). *2009 Policy on Evaluation*.

2.1 Multiple Lines of Evidence

The research methodology incorporated multiple lines of evidence, ensuring reliability of collected information and reported results. The lines of evidence used to evaluate the Programs' relevance, performance, efficiency and economy are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sources of Information Reviewed During the Program Evaluation

Methodology	Source
Non-departmental document reviews	Various non-departmental documents such as: Parliamentary reports, Budget speeches, Speech from the Throne, program literature from other countries, and published journals relating to Veterans' interests were reviewed.
Interviews and/or work observation	More than 40 interviews were conducted with VAC management, staff involved in the delivery of the programs, provincial/municipal governments offering similar programs, and other subject matter experts. Interviews were also conducted with major third-party providers who play a role in the delivery of the programs.
Departmental documentation and secondary research review	The following types of departmental documents/information were reviewed to gain an understanding of the Programs, their authorities and requirements, and key issue areas: Memoranda to Cabinet; Memoranda of Understanding and their Annexes; previous audits and evaluations; policies; business processes; performance reports; research papers; survey results; media articles; and complaints.
Statistical analysis	Financial, demographical, and operational data collected by VAC and the Last Post Fund for fiscal years 2012-13 to 2015-16 were examined.
Site visits	Site visits took place in Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax to observe and speak with staff and program delivery partners associated with all three programs. The evaluation team also visited 18 cemeteries located in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Quebec.
File review	A file review was completed on a sample of 103 Veteran cases. In addition, judgmental sampling ¹² was conducted on 113 files associated with Matter-of-Right decisions (Funeral and Burial Program) and issuance of Memorial Crosses (Honours and Awards Program). Further judgmental sampling (353 cases) was completed for specific medical conditions in relation to Matter-of-Right decisions.

¹² Statistics Canada. *Publication 12-004-X*, Non probability Sampling.

2.2 Limitations and Analytical Challenges

The following limitations were identified:

- The Budget 2016 change in the exemption amount for the Funeral and Burial Program may impact future demand. The evaluation used existing intake forecasts, interviews and statistical analysis to estimate future needs for the Program.
- The evaluation team did not speak directly with program applicants. Where available, the evaluation team used existing public opinion research as well as internal and external studies. Interviews were conducted with representatives who deal directly with Veterans and their families to gauge the needs and views of Program recipients.
- Limited detailed statistical data was available for the Honours and Awards Program for the evaluation scope period. This lack was partially mitigated by reviewing published data and conducting file reviews.
- There is no Performance Measurement Strategy¹³ (PMS) specific to the Honours and Awards Program; rather, it is included within the Ceremonies and Events PMS. Outcomes and economy will be assessed to a greater extent during an upcoming evaluation of the overall program.

The above limitations should be considered when reading the evaluation findings.

¹³ Performance Measurement Strategy is a results-based management tool that is used to guide the selection, development and ongoing use of performance measures. Government of Canada. *Supporting Effective Evaluations: A Guide to Developing Performance Measurement Strategies*.

3.0 Relevance

3.1 Continued Need for the Program

There is a continued need for the Programs.

The Programs fulfill a unique need for recipients and contribute jointly to the achievement of the Department's commemorative objectives. Specific Program objectives include:

- Funeral and Burial: "Eligible Veterans who pass away as a result of their service or without financial means receive funeral and burial assistance from VAC."
- Cemetery and Grave Maintenance: "To maintain...cemeteries and grave markers throughout the world...To ensure that Canadians can access and take pride in these symbols of remembrance."¹⁴

The Honours and Awards Program, as a subset of the overall Ceremonies and Events Program, does not have a program-specific objective; however, its purpose can be broadly defined as providing tangible reminders of the sacrifices made and the valour shown by Veterans as well as recognizing those who have made significant contributions to the Veteran community.

3.1.1 Current recipients of the Programs

Funeral and Burial Program

Approximately 20,100 Veterans passed away in Canada during 2015-16, similar in number to the previous three years. During the evaluation period, the proportion of Veteran estates that received benefits through the Funeral and Burial Program ranged from 5.6% to 6.0%. Table 4 shows the estimated number of deaths and the number of benefit recipients by service type and year.

¹⁴ This objective references VAC Memorials which was scoped out of this evaluation. Detailed information on VAC Memorials will be included in an upcoming evaluation during 2017-18.

Table 4: Deaths and Funeral and Burial Program Reach by Year and Service Type

	Actuals			
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Estimated Deaths				
War Service Veterans	14,700	13,900	12,800	11,600
Canadian Armed Forces Veterans	6,700	7,800	7,500	8,500
Total Veteran Deaths	21,300	21,700	20,300	20,100
Funeral and Burial Program Participation				
War Service Veterans	1,016	950	814	729
Canadian Armed Forces Veterans	211	263	372	445
Total Recipients	1,227	1,213	1,186	1,174
Overall % reached	5.8%	5.6%	5.8%	5.8%

Source: VAC Finance Division

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding

Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program

Each new grave marker provided through the Funeral and Burial Program increases the number of Veteran graves maintained through the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program. VAC has an obligation through this Program to preserve the memory of deceased Canadians who served their country during war and peace by maintaining symbols of remembrance in perpetuity.¹⁵

In 2004, the Department introduced the Canada Remembers Grave Tracking (CRGT) system which allows for more efficient tracking of graves. Each year the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, through a contract with VAC, conducts cyclical tours to inspect graves and periodically discovers graves which were not previously known to VAC, which also increases the number of Veteran graves maintained through the Program. The volume of known Veteran graves in Canada increased from 177,366 in 2012-13 to 206,955 in 2015-16. Veteran graves overseas (570) and war dead graves throughout the world (110,364) are also maintained by VAC and CWGC.

Honours and Awards Program

War service Veterans are entitled to first issue and replacement service medals. Families of Veterans whose death were attributed to their service are eligible to receive a Memorial Cross from VAC, serving as a memento of personal loss and sacrifice.¹⁶ The Honours and Awards Program also coordinates the provision of the Minister of Veteran Affairs Commendations which is aimed at recognizing those who contribute to the Veteran community. A large increase in issuance of first issue war service medals¹⁷ in 2014-15 could be associated with the creation of the Arctic Star and the Bomber

¹⁵ Veterans Affairs Canada. (February 2013). *Memorials and Cemetery/Grave Maintenance Program Evaluation*, p 17.

¹⁶ Veterans Affairs Canada. *Remembrance, Medals and Decorations*.

¹⁷ Veterans Affairs Canada. *Veterans Affairs Canada Report of Plans and Priorities 2016-17*, sub-program 2.1.1, p 39.

Command Bar, introduced during the evaluation period. Table 5 shows the total number of honours and awards issued during the evaluation period.

Table 5: Honours and Awards by Fiscal Year

Medal Type	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
First Issue War Service Medals	426	262	505	315
Replacement War Service Medals	183	158	160	167
Memorial Crosses	88	176	158	138
Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendations	91	0 ¹⁸	79	91
Totals	788	596	902	711

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

3.1.2 Responsiveness of VAC to the needs of recipients?

The evaluation team reviewed the responsiveness of two of the Programs to the needs of recipients: Funeral and Burial Program and Honours and Awards Program. Because the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program's primary purpose is to maintain the graves of Veterans and war dead in perpetuity, recipient needs are continuous and do not change.

Funeral and Burial Program

As a result of the 2009 evaluation of the Funeral and Burial Program and reports published by the Veterans Ombudsman and House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the Program has seen a number of changes over the past four years:

- The amount of eligible funeral and burial expenses increased from \$3,600 to \$7,386;
- Program eligibility expanded to include CAF Veterans;
- Administrative costs of running the program were reduced by approximately \$1 million; and
- Survivor exemption amount increased from \$12,015 to \$35,738.¹⁹

¹⁸ In 2013, due to a VAC Ministerial change, presentations were delayed until the following year.

¹⁹ The survivor estate exemption increase was identified in Budget 2016. Changes to regulations to support this were implemented in October 2016, outside of the scope period of this evaluation. Veterans Affairs Canada. (2016). *Budget 2016*, Commemoration, Quick Facts: Funeral and Burial Program.

Honours and Awards

In keeping with VAC's mandate of commemoration and the desire of Canadians to recognize the service of Veterans, new honours and awards²⁰ have been created during the evaluation time frame to recognize the sacrifices of service associated with the Battle of Normandy and with the Bomber Command. Outside of issuing Memorial Crosses in respect of Veterans who passed away after release, VAC does not have any current responsibility issuing medals/awards to Canadian Armed Forces Veterans. Staff interviews revealed VAC has been receiving an increase in requests from CAF Veterans for medals/awards; the requestors are redirected to DND.

3.1.3 Future of the Programs

Demand for the Programs is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, with the number of Veteran deaths in any given year affecting the number of recipients.²¹

Funeral and Burial Program

The overall annual number of Veteran deaths is forecast to decline gradually over the next three years. Program reach is expected to remain relatively unchanged for the same period, with the forecasted increase in CAF Veteran deaths offsetting the decrease in war service Veteran deaths. Table 6 shows forecasted deaths and Program reach.

Table 6: Forecasted deaths and estimated future reach of the Funeral and Burial Program

	Forecasts			
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Estimated Deaths				
War Service Veterans	11,600	13,900	12,800	11,600
Canadian Armed Forces Veterans	8,500	7,800	7,500	8,500
Total Veteran Deaths	20,100	21,700	20,300	20,100
Estimated Funeral and Burial Program Participation				
War Service Veterans	560	500	440	380
Canadian Armed Forces Veterans	500	530	560	590
Total Recipients	1,060	1,030	1,000	970
Overall % reached	5.3%	5.3%	5.4%	5.4%

Source: VAC Finance Division

²⁰ The Governor General's Chancellery Office is responsible for the Canadian Honours system and for creating new honours. VAC has responsibility for issuing these new honours.

²¹ The number of deaths which occur each year has a greater impact on the Funeral and Burial and the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance program. Deaths effect the future intake for the Memorial Cross portion of the Honours and Awards Program.

Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program

As noted in section 3.1.1, future demand for the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program is driven, in part, by new Veteran graves being added to the complement of maintained graves. Although maintenance is performed each year, there are still a number of graves requiring maintenance. In 2016, more than 45,000 Veteran graves in Canada needed maintenance. VAC's responsibility for maintaining and replacing grave markers is identified in Section 5 of the *Department of Veterans Affairs Act*. The need for the program continues in perpetuity, in that even if all the outstanding maintenance is completed, additional maintenance will be required as identified through the 12-year cyclical inspections.

Honours and Awards Program

Components of the Honours and Awards Program are affected differently by the current and future make-up of the Veteran population. There are no forecasts available relating to the future demand for medals and awards offered through the Program; however, based on actual requests during the evaluation period, it can be anticipated that there will be a continued need for the war service medal component of the Program for the next five years. As the war service population declines, there is a strong likelihood that the volume of medal requests will also decrease. The next Program evaluation should place more emphasis on determining ongoing need.

3.1.4 Is there overlap or duplication with like programs offered through other federal departments or levels of government?

No overlap or duplication was identified between the Program and other federal/provincial/municipal services.

The Programs fill a definite need for the Veteran community and the evaluation team found no overlap with programs and services offered through other authorities, a finding consistent with both the 2009 evaluation of the Funeral and Burial Program and the 2013 evaluation of the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program.

Funeral and Burial Program

In addition to VAC, four federal departments offer funeral and burial benefits. Through Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the Government of Canada offers all eligible working Canadians with a one-time Canadian Pension Plan Death Benefit to the estate of a deceased CPP contributor.²² Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada provides basic funeral and burial assistance, within a specified expenditure limit, for indigenous peoples with insufficient means to pay for a burial. Both the Royal Canadian

²² Government of Canada. *Death Benefit*.

Mounted Police and the Department of National Defence offer funeral and burial benefits to their members under an employee benefit and compensation program, and are considered an entitlement for all members who die in service. Other Canadians who die without sufficient means to pay for a funeral are buried at the expense of provincial or municipal social assistance programs.

Because Veterans' estate assets, including other funeral and burial benefits, are identified upon application to VAC's Funeral and Burial Program, there is no overlap in funding provided. In other words, while the various programs have similarities, VAC financial benefits are designed to enhance, not duplicate, services found elsewhere for Veterans.

Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program

There are currently no provincial/federal authorities which offer regularly scheduled maintenance of Veterans' graves. Community groups or local churches sometimes provide cosmetic upgrades to grave markers, particularly around key remembrance events, however they are not regularly scheduled and would not provide major maintenance if required. Therefore the Program fills a need which is not otherwise met.

Honours and Awards Program

The Department of National Defence provides service medals for Canadian Armed Forces Members/Veterans while VAC provides medals for war service Veterans. Although there is no duplication in the actual duties performed by the two federal departments, interviewed staff noted enquires were often received from CAF Veterans, who therefore had to be redirected to the proper channels.

3.2 Alignment with Government Priorities

The Programs are aligned with Government of Canada priorities and with the strategic outcomes of Veterans Affairs Canada.

The Government of Canada has emphasized its support to Veterans in its commitments to the Canadian public.

The 2015 Speech from the Throne states: *“In gratitude for the service of Canada’s Veterans, the Government will do more to support them and their families.”*²³ This support for Veterans was also reflected in the October 2013 Speech from the Throne which stated that the Government of Canada *“...will always keep faith with those who have defended Canada with pride. Our veterans have stood up for us; we will stand by them.”*²⁴ Through these speeches, the Government made a commitment to:

- Ensure dignified funerals for our injured Veterans;
- Reduce red tape so Veterans can access the benefits they need; and
- Reach out to homeless Veterans and help give them the support they need.

In the Mandate Letter²⁵ to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, it is noted that its goal is to ensure that it lives up to

“...our sacred obligation to veterans and their families. I expect you to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. You will ensure that we honour the service of our veterans and provide new career opportunities, make it easier for veterans to access services – including mental health services – and do more to support the families of Canada.”

In relation to this evaluation, the letter entrusts the Minister of Veterans Affairs to:

- Ensure that all Veterans receive a dignified burial.

VAC’s 2016-17 Report on Plans and Priorities,²⁶ which is driven by three basic principles - care, compassion, and respect states: *“We will care for the women and men who have*

²³ Government of Canada. (December 2015). *MAKING REAL CHANGE HAPPEN Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the Forty-second Parliament of Canada December 4, 2015*, p 6.

²⁴ Government of Canada. (October 2013). *Speech from the Throne to open the Second Session Forty First Parliament of Canada*, 3. Putting Canada First.

²⁵ Government of Canada. (November 2015). *Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter*.

served Canada, and through our support for them, assist their families. We will show compassion for their needs and work hard to meet them. We will respect them, and recognize their extraordinary service and sacrifices.” Priorities and planned activities include:

- Recognize and honour those who served our country through Canada Remembers Program initiatives, including financial assistance for Veterans’ funerals and burials.
- Advance work on the Government’s commitments to ensure that no Veteran is denied a dignified funeral and burial.
- Commemorate the achievements and sacrifices made by Veterans and the fallen, and keep those who served in the hearts of Canadians.
- Identify and implement legislative changes and strategies to address complexity, gaps and shortfalls in VAC programming to better meet the needs of Veterans.

The Programs address the Government’s Veterans-related priorities by providing recognition, remembrance and financial assistance to eligible Veterans and their families.

²⁶ Veterans Affairs Canada. (March 2016). *Veterans Affairs Canada Report of Plans and Priorities 2016-17*, p 1.

3.3 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities

The Programs directly align with federal roles and responsibilities

Under Section 5 of the *Department of Veterans Affairs Act*²⁷ and the authority of P.C. Order 1965–688,²⁸ the Minister of Veterans Affairs is entrusted with the primary responsibility for all matters relating to the commemoration of the war dead and recognition of the achievements of all Veterans. The Programs contribute to the Department fulfilling these responsibilities.

The Department's second of three strategic outcomes is identified in the 2016-17 Report on Plans and Priorities as:

- Canadians remember and demonstrate their recognition of all who served in Canada's efforts during war, military conflict, and peace.

The Programs directly support VAC's commemorative responsibilities and this strategic outcome through the provision of funding and services to ensure the sacrifices of those who served Canada in war, military conflict and peace are not forgotten.

²⁷ Government of Canada, Justice Laws. Section 5 of the Department of Veterans Affairs Act states "The Governor in Council may make regulations...for providing, maintaining and replacing grave markers and for providing financial assistance towards the expenses of last sickness, funeral, burial and cremation ...".

²⁸ Veterans Affairs Canada. *Commemoration Order of 1965; Order in Council of Canada, 1965; P.C.1965-688*, p 3.

4.0 Performance

4.1 Performance Tools and Measurement

Performance Measurement Strategies are in place and performance results are being collected; however, administrative expenditure breakdowns are incomplete for both the Funeral and Burial Program and the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program.

Performance measurement monitors the progress of programs towards their expected results²⁹. A Performance Measurement Strategy (PMS) is used to regularly measure key indicators and results. This information can be used to assess against expectations and to assist in measuring the effectiveness and success of a program. A program Performance Measurement Plan (PMP) and a program logic model are tools that support the PMS.

The evaluation team reviewed the PMS, PMP and associated performance reporting for both the Funeral and Burial Program and the Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program, confirming:

- Performance Measurement Strategies are approved/current;
- Performance Measurement Plans identifying the specific outputs, outcomes and associated performance indicators are in place;
- Performance results are available, both through operational reporting and strong public opinion research;
- Data/expenditure information pertaining to administrative costs is incomplete, specifically in relation to:
 - Resources required to support decision-making associated with Matter-of - Right decisions for the Funeral and Burial Program; and
 - VAC and CWGC resources required to contract cemetery maintenance.

The Honours and Awards Program is part of the PMS for the broader Ceremonies and Events Program, therefore the strategy and outcomes associated with this program will be assessed in a separate evaluation scheduled for 2017-18.

²⁹ Government of Canada. *Supporting Effective Evaluations: A Guide to Developing Performance Measurement Strategies*, section 6.3.

Outside of the scope of this evaluation, a new Government of Canada *Policy on Results* came into effect in July 2016,³⁰ detailing the requirements for departments to clearly identify core responsibilities and associated departmental programs with these respective responsibilities. In support of the new policy, departments will develop Program Inventories and Performance Information Profiles to replace Performance Measurement Strategies. Future evaluations will assess the appropriateness of the Department's updated performance measures/outcomes.

4.2 Achievement of Expected Outcomes

Program outcomes are the changes or differences that result from program activities and outputs. Outcomes are described as immediate, intermediate, or ultimate based on the contribution/influence the program has on each outcome. As outlined by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) guideline, *Supporting Effective Evaluations: A Guide to Developing Performance Measurement Strategies*³¹:

- immediate outcome(s) should equate to a “change in awareness, knowledge or skill;”
- intermediate outcome(s) should equate to a “change in the target population’s behavior;” and
- ultimate outcome(s) should equate to a “change of state in a target population.”

When the above outcomes are met, the Program contributes to the Department's Strategic Outcome #2: *Canadians remember and demonstrate their recognition of all who served in Canada's efforts during war, military conflict, and peace.*

This section of the evaluation assesses the extent to which the outcomes of the Programs are being achieved.

³⁰ The *Policy on Results* lays out a new system of reporting on performance based on departments' core responsibilities. Government of Canada. *Policy on Results*.

³¹ Government of Canada. *Supporting Effective Evaluations: A Guide to Developing Performance Measurement Strategies*.

Immediate Outcome #1: Funeral and Burial Program The service provider has the funding and tools it needs to financially assist the estates of eligible Veterans.

The Service Provider (Last Post Fund) has the funding and tools needed to financially assist the estates of eligible Veterans; however, access to additional demographic information on potential applicants would enhance the Program's reach.

VAC and the Last Post Fund have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure the service provider has the funding available to financially assist the estates of eligible Veterans. It states that the Minister of Veterans Affairs shall "approve and advance funds to the Corporation on a quarterly basis for reasonable administrative and operating expenses incurred by the Corporation in accordance with an approved annual budget for the provision and administration of last sickness, funeral, burial, cremation and grave marking benefits for Veterans and other eligible persons, in accordance with Part I of the Regulations (*Veterans Burial Regulations*).” Annual forecasts are prepared to ensure that the funding allocated to the Last Post Fund is sufficient to meet the requirements of the Program. The funds provided to the Last Post Fund for the past four fiscal years are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Funds advanced to the Last Post Fund

Expenditure Type	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Funds advanced to the Last Post Fund	\$7,949,251	\$8,461,534	\$8,547,329	\$9,050,000

Source: VAC Finance Division

The evaluation team observed and confirmed through interviews that the Last Post Fund has the tools available to assist the estates of eligible Veterans. It has appropriate templates and systems (telephone and database) to support the determination of eligibility and the processing of payments.

The evaluation team identified that limited access to contact information for the survivors or power-of-attorneys/next-of-kin of deceased Veterans is impeding the Last Post Fund's ability to make contact with potential recipients. If the Veteran was in receipt of VAC benefits or services at the time of death, the Last Post Fund is notified with the intention that information packages be distributed. However, in certain circumstances, lack of access to contact information results in the Last Post Fund not connecting with the Veteran's estate and therefore no application is received. Each year, the estates of approximately 3,000 Veterans in receipt of VAC benefits and services at the time of death have no confirmed contact with the Last Post Fund, a portion of which can be attributed to lack of current contact information. It is the evaluation team's opinion that providing the Last Post Fund with access to all current contact information within VAC's database would increase the Program's ability to reach additional estates of potential program recipients.

**Immediate Outcome #2:
Funeral and Burial
Program**

Estates of eligible Veterans have access to financial assistance for funeral and burial services.

Procedure and process improvements are required to ensure that the estates of deceased Veterans who were in receipt of VAC services associated with low income, homelessness, or disability benefit conditions commonly attributed to service-related deaths receive targeted follow-up for potential eligibility.

The Funeral and Burial Program provides access to financial assistance for funeral and burial services to approximately 1,200 Veterans' estates annually, representing close to 6% of Veteran deaths that occur each year.

Program eligibility is determined through either a Means Test or a Matter-of-Right decision. A Means Test is performed by the Last Post Fund through a financial assessment of a Veteran's estate, taking into account marital status, number of dependents and net assets.³² When a Veteran's death is related to military service due to a condition for which VAC provided a disability benefit (must be determined by a VAC medical authority), assistance may be granted as a Matter-of-Right (no Means Test). Approximately 11% of Veterans' estates are being assessed for eligibility. Table 8 breaks down eligibility decisions by type and reach.

Table 8: Funeral and Burial Eligibility Decisions by Type and Reach

Funeral and Burial Program	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Favorable eligibility through financial Means Test	1,050	1,050	1,078	986
Favorable eligibility through Matter-of-Right	177	163	108	188
Total recipients	1,227	1,213	1,186	1,174
Unfavorable decisions	1,569	1,077	1,165	1,065
Total decisions	2,796	2,290	2,351	2,239
Estimated Veteran deaths	21,300	21,700	20,300	20,100
Overall % of Veteran's estates that received an eligibility decision	13.1%	10.6%	11.6%	11.1%
Overall % of Veteran's estates that received financial assistance	5.8%	5.6%	5.8%	5.8%

Source: VAC Finance Division/Last Post Fund

Although the overall intake to the Program has remained relatively consistent over the past four years, the evaluation found that there is a risk that the Program is not fully reaching Veterans.

³² Additional information can be found on the Last Post Fund website.

To assess the Program's reach from a financial need perspective, the evaluation team used data analysis and file reviews to determine the extent to which funeral and burial eligibility was reaching the estates of Veterans who had an increased likelihood of requiring assistance due to low income and/or from being homeless. Over the four-year period, 119 Veterans died while receiving VAC services and benefits that supported these areas of need. The analysis showed:

- 45% of the estates associated with these Veterans received eligibility decisions for the Funeral and Burial Program; of those 83% were deemed to have financial insufficiency and received access to funds for funeral and burial services.
- 55% of the estates did not receive eligibility decisions, either because they were not contacted for potential eligibility or there was no response to the information sent out by the Last Post Fund (address/contact information available to the LPF may have been incomplete, therefore it cannot be confirmed that packages were ever received).

Through interviews, the evaluation team confirmed that no mechanisms were in place to monitor and/or provide additional assistance/follow-up to this group. Therefore, the evaluation concluded that VAC should implement proactive procedures and processes to better support these targeted groups.

With respect to the Program reach associated with Veterans likely to be eligible through a Matter-of-Right decision, the evaluation team was informed there is potential that cases are being missed and that certain medical conditions represent a large portion of favorable Matter-of-Right decisions.

A demographic analysis identified that Veterans who were single/widowed were less likely to receive eligibility through a Matter-of-Right decision. Analysis showed that 1 in 34 Disability Benefit recipients who were married/common law at their time of death received Matter-of-Right eligibility while only 1 in 124 Disability Benefit recipients who were single/widowed at the time of death received Matter-of-Right eligibility.

A Gender Based Analysis³³ of this finding determined that the estates of female Veterans are negatively impacted. During the evaluation period, female Disability Benefit recipients who passed away were more likely to be single/widowed than males, thus were less likely to receive a Matter-of-Right eligibility decision.

An analysis of medical conditions associated with Veterans who received favorable Matter-of-Right decisions during the evaluation period indicated the most common are: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Heart Disease, Coronary Artery Disease, Carcinoma of Lung/Rectum, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Pulmonary Fibrosis,

³³ "GBA+is used to assess the potential impacts of policies, programs, services, and other initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, taking into account gender and other identity factor." Status of Women Canada. *What is GBA+?*

Mesothelioma and respiratory cancers. The evaluation team found that more than 50% of Veterans in receipt of VAC benefits for one or more of these conditions did not receive a Matter-of-Right eligibility decision. A subsequent file review on these cases found a medical professional's determination on eligibility should be pursued in cases where the death information is recorded on VAC's Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN).

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that measures be implemented to increase access to funeral and burial financial assistance for:

- Veterans receiving VAC benefits and/or services for low income and/or homelessness (Means Tested); and
- Single/Widowed Veterans and Veterans in receipt of disability benefits for certain conditions (Matter-of-Right).

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action to be Taken	Office of Primary Interest (OPI)	Target Date
The Director General, Commemoration will implement measures (e.g. generating detailed exception reports and establishing follow-up actions) to help increase access to funeral and burial Means Tested financial assistance for Veterans that were in receipt of benefits for low income and/or have been identified as homeless/having increased risk for homelessness.	Director General, Commemoration	June 2017
The Director General, Commemoration will develop and release communication messaging to Field Operations which emphasizes/confirms the requirement to render Matter-of-Right decisions for single Veterans.	Director General, Commemoration	June 2017
The Department will develop a referral process for decisions aimed at ensuring Matter-of-Right consideration for the survivors/estates of Veterans that were in receipt of disability benefits for certain conditions.	Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM), Strategic Policy and Commemoration in conjunction with ADM, Service Delivery	December 2017

**Immediate Outcome #3:
Cemetery and Grave
Maintenance:**

Properly maintained and presented VAC memorials, cemeteries and grave markers on behalf of all Canadians.

Additional funding is required to ensure all Veteran grave markers are properly maintained.

Due to different contract arrangements, the graves of the war dead of the First and Second World Wars and the graves of deceased Canadian Veterans were assessed separately.

Canadian War Dead of the First and Second World Wars

As part of a 1917 Royal Charter, Canada, along with other member countries entered into an agreement with the Imperial War Graves Commission (now known as Commonwealth War Graves Commission). This Charter provided the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) with the mandate to mark and maintain the graves of Commonwealth servicemen and servicewomen who died during the First World War. The Charter was later updated to include war dead from the Second World War. Approximately 110,000 Canadians lost their lives during these wars and are buried in more than 70 countries throughout the world. The vast majority of Canadian war dead graves are found in France, Belgium and Italy. In keeping with the commitment of the 1917 Royal Charter, Canada through VAC, provides an annual grant to the CWGC for the maintenance of these graves. CWGC has become known as a worldwide authority in the area of military cemetery and grave marker maintenance³⁴ and interviews and document reviews showed that CWGC maintains war dead graves to a high standard.

VAC provides a grant to CWGC, with the amount depending on the work required and applicable exchange rates. Table 9 shows the annual grants by fiscal year.

Table 9: Grant Provided to CWGC

Expenditure Type	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Funds advanced to the CWGC	\$9,391,002	\$9,714,969	\$10,913,493	\$12,040,538

Source: VAC Finance Division

The evaluation team observed grave markers at 18 cemeteries located in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Quebec. The majority of the 37 war dead grave markers which were observed were acceptable. In a few instances, improvements relating to cleaning and minor misalignment of the marker were required.

³⁴ Commemoration Division Memorial and Cemetery Maintenance Performance Measurement Strategy, July 11, 2012, p 8.

Deceased Canadian Veterans

VAC is also responsible for the grave maintenance of more than 200,000 Veterans who were buried by the Government of Canada. They are located in more than 6,000 cemeteries throughout the country.

Until 2003, VAC received approximately \$5M per year for the upkeep of Veterans' graves throughout the country. At that time, since VAC was unable to accurately account for graves requiring maintenance and their locations, this amount was reduced to \$1M. The annual budget amount increased to \$1.2M in 2009 and has since remained consistent. Of this amount, \$700,000-\$800,000 is allocated for contracts to maintain Veteran graves: the remaining funds are used to support cyclical inspections of graves, address CWGC administrative costs, and manage and maintain VAC's two departmental cemeteries.

In 2004, VAC developed the Canada Remembers Grave Tracking (CRGT) system, a database to identify and track the condition of all the Veteran graves in Canada for which the Department is responsible. It then contracted the CWGC to locate, identify and provide condition reports on the identified markers. The database currently lists more than 200,000 Veteran grave markers with a corresponding report on their condition. More than 45,000 of these Veteran grave markers require maintenance, with a total of close to 60,000 repairs required (some grave markers require more than one type of repair).

Interviews with VAC and CWGC identified that there are not enough funds currently allocated to Veteran grave maintenance to address the known required repairs; i.e., the current funding level allows VAC to perform only a portion of the required maintenance. To manage the work, VAC produces an annual cemetery and grave maintenance plan which identifies and prioritizes required maintenance work in private cemeteries throughout Canada as well as in its two departmental cemeteries. VAC contracts with various suppliers, including the Canadian Agency of the CWGC to administer the work.

Additionally, as part of its contract with VAC, CWGC is responsible for providing an inspection report on all Veterans' graves on a 12- year cycle, allowing for the inspection of approximately 17,000 Veteran graves per year. Table 10 shows the volumes of maintenance on an annual basis.

Table 10: Repairs and Grave Markers that Received Repairs by Year

Repairs per year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	4-year Average
# of repairs	2,707	2,630	3,875	4,176	3,347
# of Veteran grave markers repaired	2,622	2,500	3,730	4,046	3,225

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

Repair costs differ significantly, from \$75 for grave marker cleaning to \$1,100 for a new upright marker. While the total volume of repairs increased over the past two years, the

number of lower cost repairs (e.g., cleaning) increased and the number of higher-cost repairs (e.g., grave marker replacements) decreased.

Through graveyard visits, the evaluation team assessed various elements to determine issues/concerns that may be visible to the general public. Of the 103 Veteran grave markers appraised, 96% (99/103) were identified as needing improvement; however, 77% (76/99) of these required only minor repairs (cleaning, weeding, and potential alignment) and were still assessed as achieving the Program's outcome of being properly maintained. Most of the 23 markers assessed as not achieving this outcome required major repairs such as replacement markers due to cracks/breaks, foundation issues and inscription legibility.

The overall number of outstanding repairs has decreased by close to 9% since 2013; however, higher-cost maintenance items such as legibility issues, grave marker replacements and foundation repairs have been increasing on an annual basis and should be considered as priority items. As observed, these higher-cost items have a significant impact on the achievement of the Program outcome. Table 11 shows outstanding repairs by year.

Table 11: Outstanding Repairs by Fiscal Year³⁵

Repair Type	2013	2014	2016	% Variance 2013-2016
Replacement	236	259	286	21.2%
Illegible	72	108	159	120.8%
Alignment	20,649	20,415	18,185	-12%
Replacement Foundation	1,198	1,249	1,463	22.1%
Grave Surfacing	668	670	750	12.3%
Cleaning	39,181	38,635	35,629	-9.1%
Other	574	609	591	3.0%
Total Repairs Required	62,578	61,945	57,063	-8.8%

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

Based on the allocated funding, an average of 3,347 repairs can be completed each year (see Table 10). At this rate, it will take more than 17 years to complete the current outstanding grave marker repairs (57,063 outstanding repairs/3,347 repairs per year).

The average cost per unique maintenance item repair over the past four years was \$225. This average encompasses lower costs repairs, such as \$75 for grave marker cleaning, and high cost repairs, such as, \$1,100 for a new upright marker. Based on the overall average of \$225, the total cost to address the 57,063 outstanding repairs is

³⁵ Breakdowns associated with 2015 are not available.

approximately \$12.8 million. Table 12 shows the breakdown and costs of completed repairs by year.

Table 12: Breakdown and Costs of Repairs Completed

Breakdowns	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	4 year totals
# of repairs completed	2,707	2,630	3,875	4,176	13,388
Expenditures specific to grave/cemetery maintenance	\$765,406	\$735,418	\$739,759	\$771,277	\$3,011,860
Average contract expenditure per grave maintained	\$292	\$294	\$198	\$191	\$225

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

Veterans Affairs Canada obtained feedback from Canadians through the 2014 *Attitudes Towards Remembrance* survey³⁶. Results showed that 62% of Canadians are satisfied with how VAC recognizes and honours Veterans through the maintenance of memorials, cemeteries and grave markers.

The evaluation concludes that additional efforts are required to ensure Veteran graves are being properly maintained. Increased funding as well as a targeted work plan are required as to ensure priority is placed on:

- Reducing the backlog of outstanding repairs; and
- Fixing higher-cost items such as legibility issues, grave marker replacements and foundation replacements, as these items have been increasing and are contributing to the inability to adequately achieve the program's immediate outcome.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the Director General of Commemoration put measures in place to reduce the backlog of outstanding Veteran grave maintenance, with an increased focus on maintenance items such as inscription legibility, grave marker replacements and foundation repairs.

³⁶ Library and Archives Canada. Public Opinion Research Report. (December 2014). *Attitudes towards Remembrance and Veterans' Week 2014 Survey of Canadians*, p ii.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action to be Taken	Office of Primary Interest (OPI)	Target Date
To reduce the volume of outstanding repairs, current practices will be reviewed for possible efficiencies. A revised approach, such as prioritizing the repair of items that compromise the structural integrity of Veteran graves, will be integrated in the annual maintenance plan.	Director General, Commemoration	June 2017
In support of the 2018-2019 maintenance plan, options will be explored for increased resource allocations to help address the backlog of maintenance items.		April 2018
Implementation of the 2018-2019 maintenance plan will begin.		April 2018

Intermediate Outcome #1: Funeral and Burial	Financial support is provided to eligible Veterans for funeral and burial expenses
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Financial support is provided to those currently eligible for the Program; however, a needs assessment associated with single Veterans should be completed to ensure current eligibility requirements are not impacting the achievement of the Program objectives.

Approximately 1,200 survivors and estates are receiving financial support through the Funeral and Burial Program each year (see Table 1).

The published service standard for processing Means Tested applications is: “a decision will be made within 30 calendar days of receiving all information in support of your application.” The performance results for this service standard have exceeded the 80% target, ranging from 87%-90% during the evaluation period.

As there are no service standards associated with payments for those accessing the program through a Matter-of-Right decision, the evaluation team recommends that process improvements and standards be established. Additional details on these findings and the associated recommendation can be found in Section 5.

The team found that the low number of issues and complaints received from estates with respect to the process and/or amount of funds received are primarily related to eligibility requirements established through the *Veterans Burial Regulations*.

With respect to eligibility when there is a survivor, Budget 2016 enhancements increased survivor estate exemption amounts from \$12,000 to more than \$35,000. This change will

help ensure an increased number of survivors are able to receive financial assistance. This increase does not pertain to the estates of single/widowed Veterans.

The primary area of concern, as identified through staff interviews, is that estates of single/widowed Veterans are challenged to meet eligibility through the Means Test, which requires that all net assets of the estate as a whole - i.e., all liquid assets (e.g., savings, life insurance, CPP Death Benefit and monthly income) and fixed assets (e.g., Veteran's residence, car and household effects) - be taken into consideration. In order for favourable eligibility to be granted for these estates, the deceased Veteran would have to have had debts that exceeded the total asset amounts.

From April 2012 to March 2016, 41% of single Veterans' estates that applied for the Funeral and Burial Program through Means Testing were granted eligibility and received an average payment of \$5,400. During the same period, 53% of the applications from the estates of Veterans that had a survivor/dependent were granted eligibility and received an average payment of \$6,100. The favourable rate and average payment for applications from survivors/dependents is expected to increase in the future as a result of Budget 2016 enhancements.

Upon further review, the evaluation team is of the opinion that the estates of single Veterans whose primary means were low-value fixed assets were at risk of not having a dignified funeral and burial. In these instances, single Veterans' estates were deemed to have available assets to either fully or partially contribute to the cost of funeral and burial due to fixed assets such as low-market value cars and low-valued property/real estate. During the evaluation period, 79 estates were either declined or received a reduced reimbursement due to a fixed asset valued at \$5,000 or less being considered as available funds.

Although there is no evidence to suggest these Veterans did not receive a dignified funeral and burial (no follow-up with specific applicants), it is possible that the expectation that a Veterans' estate would have to liquidate low value items to obtain funds for a funeral and burial could have negative impacts on the decisions made by the estate. This situation is highlighted by the evaluation team as a potential unintended outcome of the Program. It would be valuable for the Program area to undertake a needs review associated with deceased single Veterans in order to ensure current eligibility requirements are not impacting their ability to receive a dignified funeral and burial.

A Gender Based Analysis of program recipients assessed through a Means Test found that the estates of female Veterans deemed eligible represented 7% of recipients, higher than the proportion (4%) of female Veteran deaths.³⁷ This discrepancy could be attributed to females having a lower average income than males, especially in the 65 and over age group.³⁸

³⁷ During the period of April 2012-March 2016, there were 22,483 Veterans passed away that were in receipt of Disability Benefits. 21,509 (95.7%) of these Veterans were male, and 974 (4.3%) were female.

³⁸ Statistics Canada. *Table 2: Average total income of women and men, by age group, 2008.*

Annex A provides details on the Means Testing criteria differences between Veterans who had a survivor/dependents at time of death versus Veterans who were single/widowed with no dependents at time of death.

**Intermediate Outcome
#2: Cemetery and Grave
Maintenance**

**Canadians support properly maintained VAC
memorials, cemeteries and grave markers.**

Canadians agree it is important that VAC honour deceased Canadian Veterans and war dead by maintaining memorials, cemeteries and grave markers.

VAC measured this outcome through its 2014 “*Attitudes Towards Remembrance Survey*.” The survey asked participants if it is important that “VAC honour deceased Canadian Veterans and war dead by maintaining memorials, cemeteries and grave markers.”³⁹ The results showed that the vast majority of Canadians (89%) agreed it is important for VAC to do so.

Canadians’ support for Veterans and war dead is also evident through a November 2015 poll released by the Historica-Dominion Institute,⁴⁰ which measured Canadians’ attitudes on remembrance and found that:

- Most (91%) Canadians ‘agree’ that Canada should do more to honour its Veterans; and
- Nine in ten (90%) ‘agree’ that Canadians should do more to honour those who fought and those who have died in war.

Media coverage and news releases relating to the subject of Veterans’ graves over the past four years provide evidence of Canadian support for properly maintained cemeteries and grave markers. Numerous articles from family members and community members identifying required repairs reference how it should be the Government’s responsibility to repair Veterans’ graves.

³⁹ Library and Archives Canada. Public Opinion Research Report. (December 2014). *Attitudes towards Remembrance and Veterans’ Week 2014 Survey of Canadians*, p ii.

⁴⁰ Historica Canada. (November 9, 2015). *Most (82%) Canadians Think Remembrance Day is as Relevant Today as When it First Began Nearly 100 Years Ago*, p 3.

**Ultimate Outcome
Funeral and Burial
Program and Cemetery
and Grave Maintenance
Program**

Canadian Veterans and those who died in service are honoured and the memory of their achievements and sacrifices is preserved.

The ultimate outcome is being achieved.

The evaluation concludes that the objectives of both the Funeral and Burial Program and Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Program contribute to the ultimate outcome of preserving the memory, achievements and sacrifices of Canadian Veterans and those who died in service. To achieve this outcome, these Programs complement other Canada Remembers programs, including Public Education and Awareness, Ceremonies and Events, Partnerships and Collaborations and Memorial Maintenance.

Public opinion research conducted by VAC shows that this ultimate outcome is being achieved. In VAC's *2010 National Client Survey*⁴¹, the vast majority (88%) of VAC program recipients reported that they are satisfied with how the Department is delivering its remembrance programs.

In addition, in both 2012 and 2014, VAC conducted Veterans' Week surveys⁴² to gain Canadians' opinions in relation to commemoration, finding that 75% and 73%, respectively, felt VAC's remembrance programming effectively honours Veterans and those who died in service, and preserves the memory of their achievements and sacrifices. The target was 70%. Further detail on the survey can be found in Annex B.

⁴¹ Veterans Affairs Canada. (July 2010). *Veterans Affairs Canada – National Client Survey*, p 76.

⁴² Library and Archives Canada. Public Opinion Research Report. *Attitudes towards Remembrance and Veterans' Week 2012 Survey*. (December 2012), p i and *Attitudes towards Remembrance and Veterans' Week 2014 Survey of Canadians*. (December 2014), p ii.

5.0 Efficiency and Economy

5.1 Economy

Funeral and Burial Program administrative costs have decreased during the evaluation timeframe; however, costs should be closely monitored to ensure they align with workload requirements.

Administrative costs associated with Matter-of-Right decisions need to be more clearly recorded.

Funeral and Burial Program

Administrative costs and resources continue to be monitored closely in response to the 2009 evaluation of the Funeral and Burial Program, which recommended that the Last Post Fund review their branch structure to ensure greater efficiencies and to reduce administrative costs. At that time, the Last Post Fund had eight physical offices and 39 employees, with administrative costs of \$2.7 million per year. To gain efficiencies and reduce costs, the Last Post Fund has reduced its physical geographic footprint and increased its national phone services capacity. Four offices have closed during the period of this evaluation⁴³, resulting in current administrative costs of \$1.9 million per year. Overall, the Last Post Fund reduced administrative costs by 29.7% between 2011-12 and 2015-16. Table 13 shows expenditures by type and year.

Table 13: Last Post Fund Expenditures

Expenditure Type	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	% Variance
Program expenditures	\$6,417,427	\$5,863,649	\$7,202,276	\$7,205,494	\$7,844,701	+ 22.2%
Administration expenditures	\$2,703,372	\$2,567,819	\$1,615,216	\$1,716,445	\$1,900,050 ⁴⁴	-29.7%
Total Expenditures	\$9,120,799	\$8,431,468	\$8,817,492	\$8,921,939	\$9,744,751	+ 6.8%
Administrative costs as % of total costs	29.6%	30.5%	18.3%	19.2%	19.5%	

Source: Last Post Fund

Despite an overall reduction in administrative costs during the evaluation time frame, such costs have increased in both 2014-15 and 2015-16, even though there has been minimal change with respect to workload activities during the same time period. The evaluation team notes that VAC is working with the Last Post Fund to closely monitor

⁴³ As of October 2016, a fifth office in Surrey, British Columbia closed. Changes in administrative costs associated with this closure are outside of the scope of this evaluation.

⁴⁴ In the 2015-16 fiscal year, the Last Post Fund implemented accounting changes in order to reflect the costs associated with unused employee leave. This change resulted in an administration cost increase of approximately \$100,000 for the 2015-16 fiscal year.

administrative costs to ensure they are aligned with workload requirements. Table 14 shows workload activities relating to decisions and payments.

Table 14: Last Post Fund Decisions and Payments Workload Activities

Decision type	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Approved decisions (includes MOR payments)	1,326	1,227	1,213	1,186	1,174
Declined decisions	1,799	1,569	1,077	1,165	1,065
Total decisions/ payments	3,125	2,796	2,290	2,351	2,239

Source: Last Post Fund

To ensure the Last Post Fund has the funding available to support program and administrative expenditures, VAC advances funds on a quarterly basis through the Last Post Fund grant. Table 15 shows the amounts provided through the grant as well as VAC's own administrative costs.

Table 15: Last Post Fund Grant and VAC Administration Costs

Expenditure Type	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Funds available through Last Post Fund Grant	\$10,979,000	\$13,908,000	\$13,728,200	\$9,328,000
Actual funds advanced to the Last Post Fund	\$7,949,251	\$8,461,534	\$8,547,329	\$9,050,000
VAC administration costs	\$328,166	\$274,554	\$323,534	\$550,332
Total Program costs (actual funds + VAC administration costs)	\$8,277,417	\$8,736,088	\$8,870,863	\$9,600,332

Source: VAC Finance Division

The evaluation team found that certain workload activities associated with the Matter-of-Right decision making process are not currently being included as a program administration cost (death screening activities [completed by Veteran Service Agents] and eligibility decisions [rendered by Senior Area Medical Officers]). In instances where Matter-of-Right decisions are made for the primary purpose of determining eligibility for the Funeral and Burial Program, these costs should be reflected as an administrative cost of the Program.

Opportunities for greater efficiency and economy:

The evaluation team observed potential overlap in workload and administrative activities between VAC and the Last Post Fund and suggests that changes could help improve process in the following situations:

- The Last Post Fund manually enters into its system Veteran demographic information (e.g., Veteran name, date of birth, date of death) that is available in VAC's database. This is a duplication of effort by LPF staff.
- The Last Post Fund requires all estates to provide a death certificate for the Veteran as part of the application package; however, VAC has previously confirmed the Veteran's death in 95% of cases. This process creates a burden on both families and LPF staff.

Cemetery and Grave Maintenance

The administrative cost ratio for Cemetery and Grave Maintenance cannot be fully determined due to challenges associated with isolating VAC and CWGC administrative costs.

Overall program costs have increased during the period of 2012-13 to 2015-16, primarily due to increased costs for the CWGC maintenance of war dead graves (influenced by exchange rates) and recent funding allocated for the expansion of the Veterans' Cemetery in Esquimalt, BC.

Administration costs for Veteran grave maintenance cannot be fully separated from other items not specific to grave maintenance, such as memorial maintenance administration/contracts and cyclical tour inspections of Veterans graves that are completed by the CWGC. A review of the combined figures shows that costs have remained relatively stable during the four-year period; however, further analysis of administrative cost comparisons between VAC and the CWGC cannot be completed.

Overall, VAC costs associated with the overall Memorial⁴⁵ and Cemetery/Grave Maintenance program, ranged from \$5,307,700 in 2012-13 to \$4,475,245 in 2015-16. Unfortunately, the administrative costs and contracts specific to memorial maintenance represent a large portion of these figures and cannot be fully separated from VAC's administrative costs for cemetery and grave maintenance.

The costs associated with contracts for Veteran/war dead grave maintenance and for departmental owned cemeteries are identified in Table 16 below.

⁴⁵ Specific elements of the program are in relation to memorial maintenance and were not included within the scope of this evaluation.

Table 16: Expenditures for Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Activities

Expenditure Type	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Annual Expenditures for the Maintenance of Veterans graves and cemeteries	\$1,216,000	\$1,158,000	\$1,228,000	\$2,132,000
- Expenditures for departmental owned cemeteries	\$102,142	\$112,582	\$146,241	\$155,723
- Additional expenditures for purchase of land to expand Veterans Cemetery in Esquimalt, BC, project at Brookside Cemetery and other special projects	-	-	-	\$880,000
- Expenditures by VAC for Veteran grave maintenance	\$413,858	\$345,418	\$381,759	\$396,277
- Expenditures by CWGC for Veteran grave maintenance	\$351,548	\$390,000	\$358,000	\$375,000
- <i>Expenditures by CWGC for cyclical inspection tours and CWGC administration costs</i>	<i>\$348,452</i>	<i>\$310,000</i>	<i>\$342,000</i>	<i>\$325,000</i>
Expenditures for the Maintenance of war dead graves in Canada and Overseas (CWGC Grant)	\$9,391,002	\$9,714,969	\$10,913,493	\$12,040,538
Total expenditures for the maintenance of graves and cemeteries	\$10,607,002	\$10,872,969	\$12,414,493	\$14,172,538

Source: VAC Finance Division/VAC Commemoration Division

It is important to highlight that different types of grave maintenance items result in substantially different costs, ranging from \$75 for grave marker cleaning to \$1,100 for a new upright marker. The number of graves that received maintenance have increased in 2014-15 and 2015-16 and associated maintenance costs per marker have been decreasing during the same time period. This analysis aligns with the findings from section 4.2 which highlight that improvements are being made for low cost items (such as cleaning), however, the higher-cost repairs of the most critical nature have been increasing during the same time period. Table 17 breaks down the expenditures and volumes of graves maintained by year. Further breakdowns for volumes of repair types and associated costs by repair type are not available.

Table 17: Expenditure per Veteran Grave Maintained

Breakdowns	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
# of graves that received maintenance	2,622	2,500	3,730	4,046
Amount of expenditures for grave/cemetery maintenance	\$765,406	\$735,418	\$739,759	\$771,277
Average expenditure per grave maintained	\$292	\$294	\$198	\$191

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

Opportunities for greater efficiency and economy:

Staff interviews revealed that the Veteran geographical breakdown of grave maintenance work between VAC and CWGC has created inefficiencies. VAC is now updating the Veteran grave maintenance contract with CWGC to ensure large projects focusing on fields of honour⁴⁶ and departmental cemeteries fall within VAC responsibility, leaving all remaining maintenance contracting to be completed by CWGC. Because it was found that CWGC could contract more efficiently for these areas, this change should improve future efficiency.

5.2 Efficiency

Funeral and Burial Program and Honours and Awards

The Funeral and Burial Program and Honours and Awards Program are both achieving current service standards, however new service standards and improved methods of internal communication should be implemented for Matter-of-Right related funeral and burial reimbursements and the issuance of Memorial Crosses.

Process improvements are required for those eligible for funeral and burial financial support through the Matter-of-Right gateway.

Funeral and Burial Program

As shown previously in Section 4.2, the Last Post Fund has been consistently achieving service standard commitments related to Means Tested decisions and payments under the Funeral and Burial Program. However, there are no service standards in place for funeral and burial payments for those deemed eligible through a Matter-of-Right decision.

Honours and Awards Program

With regards to the Honours and Awards Program, the evaluation team found that, during the evaluation period, there was inadequate tracking and storing of decisions, especially those pertaining to the Memorial Cross and the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation. This challenge prevented the evaluation team from fully assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the decision-making process; however, it concluded that the processing of war service medals is occurring in a timely manner. Table 18 shows service standard results by year.

⁴⁶ "Field of Honour reflects a tradition of military cemeteries in its uniform arrangement, the orderly placement of the graves, its monuments and its axial plan...". The Last Post Fund website.

Table 18: Honours and Awards Service Standard Results by Fiscal Year

Commitment	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
% of first issue war service medals shipped within 8 weeks of receiving all information in support of the application (target = 80%)	92%	76%	79%	100%
% of replacement war service medal requests that have an entitlement decision within 8 weeks of receiving all information in support of the application (target = 80%)	96%	100%	89%	99%
% of replacement war service medals shipped within 4 weeks of receiving the request and payment. (target = 80%)	97%	94%	94%	100%

Source: VAC Commemoration Division

As of fiscal year 2016-17, the Honours and Awards unit has implemented new tracking tools to monitor and maintain workload information. This new tracking system will help to ensure decisions are monitored and tracked more effectively, as well as equip future evaluations to better analyze trends and identify potential areas for improvement. The Honours and Awards team should ensure that all types of workload is captured via these new tools, including processing of war service medals, issuing of Memorial Crosses and tracking of Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation decisions.

The evaluation found that processes for both the funeral and burial reimbursements and issuance of Memorial Crosses associated with Matter-of-Right (death attributable) decisions require improvement. For actions arising from a Matter-of-Right decision, the Department does not have any service standards against which to measure. The evaluation team determined that ineffective communications between the VAC groups responsible for rendering Matter-of-Right decisions and both the Last Post Fund (responsible for funeral and burial reimbursement) and the Honours and Awards team (responsible for the issuance of the Memorial Cross) is contributing to delays and, in certain circumstances, cases being missed. The evaluation team identified the missing cases to the respective responsibility groups for follow-up and action and has since confirmed that estates have been contacted for potential funeral and burial reimbursement and for the issuance of the Memorial Cross.

The evaluation team found that following Matter-of-Right decisions, it takes an average of more than 100 days for funeral and burial reimbursements to be paid and more than 500 days for Memorial Crosses to be issued. In both of these instances, there are periods of time during which the Department is awaiting information from the estate; however, the data is not available to determine how much time this waiting represents.

Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that measures be implemented to ensure that the estates of Veterans whose death has been deemed related to service receive the benefits (funeral and burial

financial assistance) and recognition (Memorial Cross) to which they are entitled, in a timely manner.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management Action Plan:

Corrective Action to be Taken	Office of Primary Interest (OPI)	Target Date
The Director General, Commemoration will implement measures (e.g. generating detailed exception reports and establishing follow-up actions) to help ensure that the estates of Veterans whose death has been deemed related to service receive the benefits and recognition to which they are entitled, in a timely manner.	Director General, Commemoration	June 2017
The Department will implement system enhancements aimed at ensuring all favourable death-attributable-to-service decisions automatically generate a notification to the appropriate areas (i.e. Last Post Fund for funerals and burials; Commemoration Division for Memorial Crosses).	Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM), Strategic Policy and Commemoration in conjunction with ADM, Service Delivery and ADM, Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services	November 2018
Service standards will be established regarding the expected timeframe for a Veteran whose death is service-related to receive applicable benefits and recognition.	Director General, Commemoration	November 2018

6.0 Conclusion

The evaluation covered program activities from April 2012 to March 2016. Therefore, the recent program change through Budget 2016 to increase the Funeral and Burial survivor estate exemption amount was outside of the evaluation scope.

Relevance

Uptake and expenditures, recent program enhancements and a lack of direct duplication and overlap demonstrates a continued need for the Programs. They align with federal government priorities as well as VAC's mandate and strategic outcomes.

Achievement of Outcomes

VAC is achieving the ultimate outcomes associated with these Programs. The evaluation found areas for improvement with respect to the achievement of Immediate Outcomes for both the Funeral and Burial and Cemetery and Grave Maintenance Programs, as well as improvements required to the achievement of the Intermediate Outcome for the Funeral and Burial Program.

Efficiency and Economy

The administrative costs for the Funeral and Burial Program have decreased during the evaluation timeframe but VAC should closely monitor these costs to ensure that they continue to align with workload requirements. Some minor duplication occurring between LPF and VAC staff has been highlighted as an opportunity for improvement.

The administrative cost ratio for Cemetery and Grave Maintenance cannot be fully determined due to challenges associated with isolating VAC and CWGC administrative costs.

New service standards and improved internal processes are required for Matter-of-Right related funeral and burial reimbursements and the issuance of Memorial Crosses.

Annex A: Funeral and Burial Program Means Test criteria, as of March 2016 (per Veterans Burial Regulations)

	Veterans with a survivor and/or dependent	Single/Widowed Veterans with no dependents
Asset exemptions Items/amounts excluded when determining the financial assets available.	Residence of choice (if more than one, survivor can determine which one to exempt) Vehicle of choice (if more than one, survivor can determine which one to exempt) Deceased Veterans cheques for the month of death For all remaining assets that are considered, there is a \$12,015 exemption amount applied ⁴⁷ , with \$700 added for each additional dependent	Assets that were jointly held with another individual
Assets included Those assets that are assessed as potential financial means for providing funeral and burial.	Canada Pension Plan death benefit (if available for deceased Veteran) Life Insurance and any other death benefits payable to the estate/survivor Cash and savings over and above the exemption amount Second residence (if applicable) and other real estate Second vehicle (if applicable) Pre-paid funeral and burial expenses	Canada Pension Plan death benefit (if available) Life Insurance and any other death benefits payable to the estate Cash and savings Residence(s) and other real estate Vehicle(s) Pre-paid funeral and burial expenses
Debts included Debts are subtracted from assets to determine if there is a financial need (if there are more assets than debt, there is no financial need).	Any debts against the estate Funeral and burial expenses Grave maker allowance as debt if family doesn't choose a VAC grave marker	Any debts against the estate Funeral and burial expenses Grave maker allowance as debt if family doesn't choose a VAC grave marker

⁴⁷ Survivor estate exemption amount increased to \$35,000 through Budget 2016, implemented in October 2016. Veterans Affairs Canada. (2016). *Budget 2016*, Commemoration.

Annex B: Results of 2012 and 2014 Attitudes Towards Remembrance Survey

Attitudes Towards Remembrance and Veterans' Week survey	2012	2014
I am <u>knowledgeable</u> about the role that Canada's military has played in peace-keeping missions and conflicts like the World Wars, the Korean War, and the war in Afghanistan.	73%	69%
I am <u>proud</u> of the role that Canada's military has played in peacekeeping missions and conflicts like the World Wars, the Korean War, and the war in Afghanistan.	80%	82%
Canada's Veterans have made major contributions to the development of our country.	86%	83%
Canada's Veterans should be recognized for their service to Canada.	91%	93%
I make an effort to demonstrate my appreciation to Veterans.	66%	66%
Veterans Affairs Canada's Remembrance Program effectively honours Veterans and those who died in service, and preserves the memory of their achievements and sacrifices.	75%	73%
% of Canadians who are satisfied with how VAC recognizes and honours Veterans through the maintenance of memorials, cemeteries and grave markers.	66%	62%

Source: VAC Commemoration Division