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Appearance Details

Committee: Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA)

Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2025 (15:30 – 17:30 ET)

Location: Room 415, Wellington Building, 197 Sparks Street

Topic: Briefing by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Departmental Officials

Witnesses:

- **Hon. Jill McKnight**, Minister of Veterans Affairs
- **Christine McDowell**, Acting Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada
- **Steven Harris**, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery
- **Amy Meunier**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Commemoration and Public Affairs
- **Pierre Tessier**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services
- **Mitch Freeman**, A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Planning & Performance

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NATO SPENDING (2025-26)

- Veteran benefits represent a direct and significant contribution to achieving Canada's NATO target.
- For 2025-26, \$7.3B in benefits and services for Veterans will be included as part of Canada's contribution to NATO spending target.
- The total 2025-26 budget for Veterans Affairs Canada is \$7.8 billion.
- 94% of Veterans Affairs Canada's budget represents benefits or services provided to Veterans, their families and other program recipients.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

VAC's Contribution to NATO

- VAC's contribution to NATO spending has increased rapidly due to the growing volume of benefits and services provided to Veterans.
- 2020–21: \$3.3B
- 2024–25: \$5.7B
- Trend: Contributions will continue to rise as more Veterans access benefits and services.

Included Programs

- Most of Veterans Affairs Canada's benefits and services are included, such as:
 - Pain and Suffering Compensation
 - Income Replacement Benefit
 - Veterans Independence Program
- Planned spending for 2025–26: \$7.3B

Excluded Programs

- Only a small number of VAC programs are excluded from NATO reporting. Examples include:
 - Research programs
 - Cemetery/Grave maintenance
 - Departmental operations
- Exclusions are limited to items that do not represent direct benefits to Veterans.

Eligible Programs

- NATO and the Department of National Defence (DND) decide which programs and services qualify as NATO spending.
- Ensures consistency across countries in reporting contributions.

BACKGROUND

NATO countries had previously committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence.

Recently, Canada has agreed to a new NATO defence investment pledge to spend 5% of its GDP on defence by 2035. This commitment was made at the 2025 NATO Summit.

Per NATO accounting methodology, program payments to Veterans—particularly Disability benefits—are counted as part of eligible defence spending.

VAC's contribution is based on the number of clients receiving VAC benefits and VAC production levels. As these fluctuate, so too will VAC's contribution to the NATO commitment.

Below is a summary of VAC's contributions by year:

- 2020-21 - \$3.3B
- 2021-22 - \$3.8B
- 2022-23 - \$3.8B
- 2023-24 - \$4.2B
- 2024-25 - \$5.8B
- 2025-26 - \$7.3B

DISABILITY BENEFITS PROCESSING TIMES

- Our disability benefits program recognizes Veterans who have become ill or injured in service. Each year, nearly \$4 billion is paid to Veterans in disability benefits.
- Veterans Affairs Canada has worked to increase awareness about VAC programs and benefits.
- Over the last 9 years, the disability benefits program has experienced a 92% increase in applications and last year alone, applications rose by 7% with more than 86,000 new applications.
- In an attempt to make faster decisions for Veterans and their families, we are working on a number of actions to reduce wait times for Veterans.
- Over the last three years we have improved processing times by 43% and continue to make improvements.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Processing Times:

- Reduced by 43% since 2021/22.
- Down to 22.5 weeks in Q1 2025/26 (from 39.7 weeks)
- Reduced gap for Female and Francophone applications. In Q1 2025-/26:
 - 23.2 weeks for female and 22.3 weeks for male
 - 24.1 weeks for Francophone and 22.1 weeks for Anglophone

Applications

- Application Intake: 92% increase from 2015/16 to 2024/25
 - 86,000 (2024/25) from 63,000 applications(2019/20)
 - 7,200/month (2024/25) from 6,700 (2023/24). Increase of 7%
- Pending Applications (Q1 2025/24)
 - 43,731 total pending
 - 12,340 over the service standard (backlog)
 - 78% are from returning applicants.
- Completed Applications:
 - 58,900 completed in 2024/25. Up 6% from 2023/24 completing 55,700
 - 5,100 / month completed in Q1 2025/26. Up 4% from 2024/25 completing 4,900 / month.

Stabilization and Modernization

- Long-term resourcing plan under development, with temporary funding ending March 2026.
- Ongoing modernization includes automation, digital transformation, and updated decision-making tools.
- 22 EEGs have been updated and 11 new ones developed for high volume and complex conditions.

BACKGROUND

Historically, VAC capacity to address the processing time issue has been a challenge due to a continuous rise in the number of applications received since 2015-2016 and a lack of stable resource funding.

To keep pace with the rise in demand, the Government committed to a series of temporary funding measures for resourcing and automation.

In November 2023, the Government announced additional funding of \$164.4 million, allowing VAC to retain trained temporary employees dedicated to processing applications until March 2026.

The Department has also implemented technological improvements to speed up processing, including faster access to health provider information, streamlined document review, and prepopulated decision letters. Work continues to expand automation and integrate AI tools to assist decision-makers in reviewing large volumes of materials.

The service standard for disability benefits is 16 weeks for first applications and reassessments, and 12 weeks for departmental reviews, met 80% of the time. Complex cases may exceed these timelines, particularly when medical expertise is required.

Applications are fast-tracked for Veterans who are medically at risk, such as those who are palliative, of advance age, or facing urgent unmet health needs related to their condition.

EMPLOYMENT FOR VETERANS

- When Veterans leave the military many bring valuable skills and expertise developed through their service to Canada to a second career in various sectors and industries across Canada.
- Meaningful employment after service plays a key role in the well-being of Veterans, supporting financial stability, restoring purpose, and fostering social connection.
- The National Employment Strategy promotes Veteran employment, supports employers and makes it easier for Veterans to translate their skills to a post military career.
- We are working with certification bodies to improve recognition of military training and skills to allow Veterans to seamlessly use their expertise and leadership to help build a strong Canada.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Employment Landscape

- On average 7,800 CAF members release each year and become Veterans at the age of 34.
- Close to 50% of those releasing seek a second career that draws on their extensive training.
- 65% of Regular Force Veterans are employed within their first 3 years post-release.
- 28% of Veterans report experiencing difficulties finding civilian work, citing challenges such as credential recognition, health barriers, and lack of networks.

The National Veterans Employment Strategy

- 1,200 consultations: Veterans, employers, and stakeholders engaged in shaping the National Veterans Employment Strategy.
- 4 strategic priorities: Improve services, create Veteran Ready employers, position the public service as leader, and build partnerships.
- 90% of Strategy roadmap items are underway and 50% of actions are completed.

Engagement and Partnerships

- 7,100+ registration with over 400 employer presentations delivered through Career Webinars.
- Over 6,000 members in the *Hire a Veteran* LinkedIn Group with over 600 employer representatives actively posting dozens of postings weekly.
- Key partnerships built with stakeholders including Helmets to Hardhats, True Patriot Love, Treble Victor Group, Coding for Veterans and Soldiers in Tech.

Employment Programs and Services

- Career Transition Services: available to Veterans, survivors, and families – providing job coaching, resume and interview prep, and direct job placement.
- Veterans Job Bank: centralized hub for job postings, developed with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) in 2020.
- *Veterans Hiring Act* amendment and the *Public Service Employment Act (2015)*: amended to grant priority hiring status for medically released Veterans.

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is committed to ensuring that CAF members and Veterans are supported in their transition to life after service. Employment is a critical component to overall well-being, providing stability, a renewed sense of purpose, and social connection.

On June 28, 2024, VAC launched the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES). This strategy represents a major milestone in advancing Veteran employment outcomes, shaped by more than two years of research and consultation with over 1,200 Veterans, employers, and stakeholders across Canada.

The NVES is built around four foundational objectives:

1. **Improved Services and expand programs** for Veterans.
2. Create and recognize “**Veteran Ready**” **employers** committed to hiring, training, and retaining Veterans.
3. Position the **Federal Public Service as a leader** in Veteran employment.
4. Build **trusted partnerships** across public, private, and not-for-profit sectors.

Key Initiatives

Skills Translation and Accreditation: Collaboration with certifying bodies and regulators to recognize military training and translate experience into the civilian workforce.

Career Transition Services (CTS): Offers coaching, resume and interview preparation, job placement, and entrepreneurship support for Veterans, survivors, and families.

Career Webinars: Over 7,100 Veteran registrations and 400 employer presentations, with hundreds of direct employer connections facilitated.

Hire a Veteran LinkedIn Group: More than 6,000 members, including 600 employer representatives, with dozens of new opportunities posted weekly.

Veteran Job Bank: A one-stop online hub for employers to post jobs directly for Veterans, developed with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) in 2020.

Partnerships: Ongoing collaboration with organizations such as Helmets to Hardhats, True Patriot Love Foundation, Treble Victor Group, Coding for Veterans, and Soldiers in Tech.

RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL (RFR) POLICY

- The Government of Canada is committed to the successful transition of Veterans from military to civilian life. This includes Veteran employment, a key factor in the overall well-being of Veterans and their families.
- The Right of First Refusal Policy has been providing employment opportunities for Veterans for over 75 years.
- It is a procurement preference that requires federal government departments to request guard services from the Corps of Commissionaires (the Corps) before seeking services from other security guard suppliers.
- On April 1, 2023, VAC implemented the *Policy on Procurement of Guard Services* to continue the RFR until March 31, 2026.
- During this three-year period, VAC has been re-assessing the policy and its requirements, engaging with stakeholders, and evaluating the RFR's continued relevance in supporting Veteran employment.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Cost

- The Government of Canada spends approximately \$350M annually through RFR contracts with the Corps.

Policy Requirement for Veteran-worked hours

- The RFR Policy requires that:
 - a minimum of 60% of all hours worked under RFR contracts in each fiscal year are to be worked by Veterans;
 - the Corps provide Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) with reports on its performance as it relates to Government contracts; and
 - VAC request a corrective action plan from the Corps if in non-compliance with the 60% requirement for Veteran-worked hours.

Challenges meeting the 60%

- Since 2013/14, the Corps has not been meeting the 60% Veteran-worked hours requirement.
- Despite attempts to improve performance in this regard, the percentage of Veteran-worked hours continues to decline and is currently at 29.1% nationally.
- Approximately 4,200 Veterans are currently working in various positions within the organization (according to the latest report provided by the Corps, 3,346 are working as guards under RFR contracts).

Legal Context

- Government has been relying on a public interest exception in the Government Contracts Regulations to justify the sole source procurement of guard services from the Corps.
- This provision exempts the requirement to solicit bids when doing so would not serve the public interest. Supporting Veteran employment has been the rationale for relying on the exception.
- The Corps is not meeting the policy's requirements for Veteran-worked hours.

BACKGROUND

Original Policy

The Right of First Refusal (RFR) Policy was established in 1945 to provide employment opportunities for Veterans while also meeting the security needs of Government.

Initially, the RFR was the responsibility of the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) under the Common Services Policy with administrative responsibilities under *the Financial Administration Act*.

This policy was rescinded and archived on March 31, 2023.

New Policy

In February 2023, Treasury Board delegated to the Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada, the authority under the *Financial Administration Act* to issue, administer, amend, or rescind an administrative policy to implement the RFR from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2026.

The new RFR Policy is being implemented in the same manner it has been implemented historically with VAC now responsible for its administration. There is a new requirement that VAC request a corrective action plan from the Corps to explain how progress will be made towards improving performance as it relates to Veteran hours worked. This has resulted in the Corps submitting a “Sustainable Employment for Veterans” report in October 2024 to outline the role the Corps plays in supporting Veterans as well as the challenges and issues being faced in the current employment landscape. Although the report outlines various steps the Corps is taking to overcome these challenges, it confirms that the number of Veterans working under the RFR is well below the 60% Veteran-worked hours requirement.

As the Government of Canada’s central purchaser, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) continues to be responsible for contracting guard services on behalf of federal organizations in accordance with the requirements of the RFR.

To date, the new policy has been received in a neutral fashion by a number of internal and external stakeholders and negatively by the private security industry who is aware of the Corps’ non-compliance with the Veteran-worked hours requirement.

In 2024, VAC launched the National Veteran Employment Strategy (NVES) which is designed to address existing gaps and leverage opportunities that may exist for new and improved supports for Veterans.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BENEFIT POLICY

- The Education and Training Benefit was implemented in 2018 and provides full support for the costs of up to four years of college, university, or technical education for Veterans after completion of their service.
- This benefit includes up to \$99,156.80 (annually indexed to Consumer Price Index) of formal funding for post-secondary programs.
- To be eligible for formal funding, a program must lead to the completion of a degree, diploma, certification or designation from an educational institution on Employment and Social Development Canada's Master List of Designated Institutions, and run at least twelve weeks within a fifteen-week period or full-time equivalent.
- A short course funding stream up to \$6,197.29 is also available for those who are interested in completing courses or programs of personal interest that do not meet the criteria noted above.
- The Department is currently reviewing program eligibility criteria and stakeholder recommendations to determine any potential program improvements.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Uptake and Expenditures .

- VAC completed 2,455 eligibility applications in 2024-25. 96% of the applications were completed within the 4-week service standard.
- 1,726 Veterans received ETB payments in 2024-25.
- The forecasted ETB expenditures for 2024-25 were \$32.9M.

Eligibility

- ETB funding may be provided to a Veteran who has:
 - (a) served for a total of at least six years in the regular force, in the reserve force or in both; and
 - (b) was honourably released from the Canadian Forces on or after April 1, 2006 or was transferred from the regular force or another subcomponent of the reserve force to the Supplementary Reserve on or after that date.

Formal Programs

- Formal program funding of up to \$99,156.80 (annually indexed to CPI) may be provided for post-secondary program training that would lead to a degree, diploma, certificate or certification.
- The funds are intended to cover education costs such as tuition, required course materials as well as materials or fees that are part of the program.

Short Courses

- A short course funding stream of up to \$6,197.29 is also available to enable Veterans to complete courses that relate to personal interest and career development.

Evaluation and Reviews

- In 2022, VAC's Audit and Evaluation completed an evaluation which found that the ETB is working well.
- Eligibility was determined to be appropriate, and based on Veteran feedback, it was determined to be meeting expectations.

BACKGROUND

VAC created the Education and Training Benefit (ETB) in 2018 to help Veterans successfully transition to post-military life, achieve their education and future employment goals, and better position them to be more competitive in the civilian workforce.

The ETB was implemented in 2018 and includes up to \$99,156.80 (annually indexed to CPI) in formal program funding for post-secondary program training that would lead to a degree, diploma, certificate or certification. The funds are intended to cover costs such as tuition, required course materials and materials or fees that are part of the program.

A short course funding stream is also available to Veterans who are interested in completing courses of personal interest. This stream of funding includes up to \$6,197.29 (annually indexed to CPI) which may be used for short courses designed for self-fulfillment and career or personal development.

The ETB has evolved consistently since 2018, VAC has been positively reactive in accommodating reasonable requests from stakeholders.

- 2019: legislation was updated to make Supplementary Reservists eligible for the benefit.
- 2021: policy revised to include technical education programs of shorter duration under formal program funding. Programs falling into this category are career-focused, intensive, and many involve a combination of classroom and hands-on learning.

Audit & Review

An evaluation of the ETB and the Career Transition Services (CTS) program which was published in October 2022.

- It found that the ETB was meeting Veterans' expectations, eligibility requirements were appropriate, and the program did not seem to be incentivizing CAF members to release.
- The evaluation recommended that VAC undertake efforts to review the regulated maximum amount available for ETB short courses and consider whether costs of licensing exams and fees should be included.
- VAC conducted internal policy analysis on the matter and is considering options in the context of various recommendations made by stakeholders, including the VAC Ministerial Policy Advisory Group.

The ETB regulations were reviewed in 2024 as part of VAC's Regulatory Stock Review Plan 2024-2026. No amendments were recommended.

COMPREHENSIVE EXPENDITURE REVIEW 2025

- The Government of Canada launched a Comprehensive Expenditure Review to meet its commitment to responsible, cost-effective spending that delivers results for Canadians.
- Veterans Affairs Canada conducted a review and submitted proposals as part of this process.
- Results of the exercise will be made available in due time as the process continues.

CAF SALARY INCREASE

- The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that members of the Canadian Armed Forces are properly compensated for their service.
- On August 8, 2025, the Prime Minister announced pay increases retroactive to April 2025 - as well as new benefit and compensation initiatives which will be rolled out over the next twelve months.
- These increases will contribute to Canada's commitment to meet NATO's military spending target and better enable CAF meet recruitment targets in the coming years.
- The calculation of the Income Replacement Benefit (IRB) delivered by Veterans Affairs Canada is based upon monthly military salary – accordingly, the recently announced increases in monthly military salary will be reflected in IRB calculations for eligible Veterans who release on or after April 1, 2025.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

VAC Contributions to Canada's NATO Commitments

- VAC is the second largest contributor (after DND) to Canada's NATO spending.
- Over the past 10 years VAC's contribution has increased from \$2.1B to \$7.3B.

Releasing CAF Members – Statistics

- An average of 6,800 Veterans released from CAF each year over the past 5 years; of these, approximately 1,860 (27%) released medically each year.
- Regular Force members are more likely to release medically and access the Income Replacement Benefit (IRB).
 - Of the 21,200 CAF members who released from the Regular Force over the past 5 years – of these, approximately 8,400 (40%) released medically.

Income Replacement Benefit - Statistics

- In 2023/24:
 - 31,477 IRB clients;
 - \$1.26B in program expenditures.

BACKGROUND

In keeping with its commitment during the 2025 Federal Election, on August 8, 2025, the Government formally announced its intention to increase CAF salaries, as well as introduce new pay benefits and compensation initiatives.

The Department of National Defence (DND) is implementing increases on top of base pay retroactive to April 1, 2025. Additionally, DND will introduce additional allowances and benefits including a new Military Service Pay benefit, calculated based on years of service, over the next 12 months (details forthcoming).

These changes to CAF pay will contribute to Canada's commitment to meet our current NATO defence spending target of 2%, and to increase this spending to 5% of annual GDP in defence by 2035 (of which 3.5% will be focussed on direct defence spending).

These increases will also assist in DND's recruitment efforts.

Income Replacement Benefit

VAC's Income Replacement Benefit (IRB) recognizes and compensates eligible Veterans for the economic impacts that health problems, resulting primarily from service, have on their ability to earn income and save for retirement.

The calculation of the IRB ensures that eligible Veterans under the age of 65 receive benefits equivalent to 90% of their "imputed income" while they are participating in VAC's Rehabilitation Program. For most Veterans, this "imputed income" is equivalent to 90% of their monthly military salary at release adjusted forward until IRB is payable.

Accordingly, the increases to CAF salary (excluding bonuses and allowances, which are not included in the calculation of IRB) will result in commensurate increases to IRB.

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

- Veteran homelessness in Canada is unacceptable; Veterans deserve a safe and affordable place to live.
- Veteran homelessness is a complex issue that requires a coordinated, sustained approach. The Government is actively working with communities and partners to reduce its occurrence and to prevent it whenever possible.
- Housing affordability remains a pressing concern for many Canadians, including Veterans. The Government welcomes the opportunity to improve Veteran well-being through the programs that will be administered by Build Canada Homes.
- Veterans Affairs is working closely with Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada and other stakeholders on initiatives to support Veterans experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.
- Veterans Affairs is working at the local level to connect Veterans with community organizations and property developers/managers who build/administer affordable housing in their area.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Veteran Homelessness in Canada

- There are an estimated 461,240 Canadian Veterans (Census 2021).
- As of October 2025, there are an estimated 1,800 Veterans who experience homelessness across Canada throughout a calendar year (based on shelter information and Point-in-Time counts).

Veteran Homelessness Program - Administered by Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC):

- \$106.8M over 5 years
- Funding is being delivered under two streams:
 - 28 organizations have received funding under **the Services and Supports Stream** which focuses on the delivery of rent supplements and wrap-around services
 - 6 organizations have received funding under **Capacity Building Stream** which focuses on research and improved data collection on Veteran homelessness, as well as increasing capacity of organizations
- Rent supplements + wraparound supports being provided
- Partnering with community organizations Canada-wide
- Part of Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy
- 1,460 Veterans have been served under the VHP (Year 1 results based on 93.5% of results reported, reflect Veterans served up until March 31, 2025)

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada Supports

Veterans Affairs provides case management to Veterans who have complex needs.

Case managers work with local partners, including the organizations receiving Veteran Homelessness Program (VHP) funding, to connect Veterans to housing and wrap around supports.

- **Veterans Emergency Fund (VEF)** provides emergency financial support to Veterans, their families and survivors at risk due to an urgent and unexpected situation.
- **Veterans and Family Well-Being Fund** provides funding to organizations for research and initiatives that support Veteran well-being, including those helping Veterans experiencing homelessness.

First Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, *Moving Towards Ending Homelessness Among Veterans (2022)*

The Government agrees with the Committee that homelessness is a complex issue for which the solution requires numerous, coordinated interventions. The Government is taking action through initiatives like the Veteran Homelessness Program, which provides rent supplements and wraparound services to Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Veterans Affairs Canada continues to work with Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada to deliver this program and collect data to better understand the issue. The Government also continues to collaborate with federal, provincial, territorial, and community partners to improve supports and services for Veterans.

The most recent data sources indicate that the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness, including those experiencing hidden homelessness, has decreased to approximately 1,800 from 2,600 in 2019.

The government is taking a "whole-of-government, evidence-based, and collaborative approach" to end Veteran homelessness by:

- Investing in housing and supports
- Funding innovative community projects
- Improving coordination and service delivery
- Focusing on data and research
- Engaging stakeholders across Canada

NATIONAL MONUMENT TO CANADA'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

- The National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan will recognize the commitment and sacrifice of the Canadian Armed Forces members and civilians who served in Afghanistan, and the support provided to them by Canadians at home.
- On June 19, 2023, the Government of Canada announced that it had selected a design and conceptual approach for the Monument submitted by a design team lead by Adrian Stimson, and member of the Siksika Nation who spent time as an artist with Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan.
- The decision to select the Team Stimson design reflected the feedback of Veterans, their families, and others who served on the mission.
- On June 19, 2025 the National Capital Commission (NCC) Board of Directors granted the final federal design approval for the Monument, based on Team Stimson's design.
- On September 23, 2025, project authority to proceed with tendering for the construction phase of the project was granted during the NCC Board of Directors meeting.
- Construction of the Monument is estimated to begin in Spring 2026 and completed in 2028, with a dedication and unveiling ceremony following the end of construction.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- The National Capital Commission (NCC) granted final approval for the Team Stimson Monument design on June 19, 2025, clearing the way for the final construction and unveiling steps in the project. The concept for the NMCMA is complex with significant details in terms of symbolism, text and design. Tariffs, material availability and specialized skill set for the construction will impact timelines.
- On September 23, 2025, project authority to proceed with tendering for the construction phase of the project was granted during the NCC Board of Directors meeting.
- Tendering is expected to take place in fall 2025 to award a contract in early 2026.
- A Sod Turning event is expected to take place in spring 2026 marking the official start of the construction phase of this initiative.
- The unveiling of the NMCMA is expected in Autumn 2028.
- Delays to the monument have occurred due to the need to secure sustainable funding before moving forward.
- The National Capital Commission's approval process requires VAC to confirm funding before implementation can proceed.

BACKGROUND

Over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) deployed to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Many Canadians died as a result of their service in Afghanistan, including 158 CAF members and 7 civilians - a diplomat, foreign aid workers, a government contractor and a journalist. The mission in Afghanistan is Canada's fifth most costly military engagement in terms of lives lost, with thousands of additional physical and psychological casualties.

On May 8, 2014, the Government of Canada announced that a monument would be built to commemorate the Afghanistan mission. Veterans Affairs Canada is responsible for funding the Monument, Canadian Heritage is the project manager and the National Capital Commission is responsible for project implementation and assumes ownership of the monument when completed.

In June 2019, the National Capital Commission Board of Directors approved the Monument site located across from the Canadian War Museum on LeBreton Flats.

In August 2019, Canadian Heritage launched Phase one of the design competition, inviting teams of professional artists, architects, landscape architects, and other urban design professionals to submit their qualifications.

In May 2020, five finalist design teams were selected by a seven-member independent jury established for the design competition process.

From May 20 to June 9, 2021, Canadian Heritage coordinated an online viewing and an online survey on the finalist design concepts, with more than 12,000 responses received.

In November 2021, the seven-member jury selected the design by Team Daoust as the finalist in the design competition process.

After consideration, the Minister of Veterans Affairs decided to select the Team Stimson design concept for the Monument as the design best reflected the comments made by Veterans, their families and other mission participants in the online survey.

On October 31, 2023, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) commenced a study of the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan, following the decision to select Team Stimson's design.

ACVA subsequently adopted a motion which "denounces the government's about-face and lack of respect for the rules in deciding not to award the design of the commemorative monument to the team linking the artist Luca Fortin and the architectural firm Daoust Lestage Lizotte Stecker, which won the competition conducted by a team of experts set up by the Liberal government itself."

In February 2025, Veterans Affairs Canada reached a settlement with Team Daoust, the design team selected by the Jury. The terms of the settlement are subject to a confidentiality clause and are therefore not public.

LAST POST FUND'S NATIONAL FIELD OF HONOUR

- We are working with the Last Post Fund to ensure that the National Field of Honour remains a solemn place of commemoration.
- The Last Post Fund is an important stakeholder, as the organization delivers the Department's Funeral and Burial Program and supports Canada's Veterans and their families.
- The Last Post Fund has asked the Government of Canada to take over the cemetery.
- The Department is in the final stages of required due diligence on this request and will continue working closely with the Last Post Fund.
- The due diligence work is expected to be completed in December 2025.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- There are hundreds of Fields of Honour across Canada (Fields of honour represent a group of Veteran graves).
- NFOH is the largest private military cemetery in Canada.
- Veterans Affairs Canada maintains approximately 250,000 eligible Veteran grave markers in over 7,800 cemeteries across the country.
- In Budget 2018, the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$24.4M over five years for Veteran grave marker maintenance. Over 110,000 repairs were made to Veteran graves in cemeteries across the country.
- A portion of the project funding was also used to repair infrastructure at cemeteries with large numbers of Veteran graves, including the Last Post Fund National Field of Honour where VAC invested approximately \$1.57M from 2018-19 to 2022-23.
- The additional funding and work completed since 2018 have positioned us well to continue the important task of honouring Canada's Veterans and preserving their legacy. We will carry on visiting the gravesites of Canadian Veterans, inspecting their grave markers, and ensuring they receive the care they deserve.
- VAC owns and operates two small legacy cemeteries (Veterans Cemetery (God's Acre) in BC and Fort Massey Cemetery in NS), acquired in the 1940s and supported by a \$1.25M annual maintenance budget.
- No new cemeteries have been acquired by VAC since the 1940s; the NFOH is significantly larger and more complex to operate than existing departmental cemeteries.
- The National Military Cemetery at Beechwood is maintained in partnership with other federal entities; VAC funds only horticultural services through its existing mandate.

BACKGROUND

The Last Post Fund (LPF) was established in 1909 to ensure all military Veterans receive a dignified funeral and burial. The non-profit organization delivers VAC's Funeral and Burial Program. In 1930, the organization created its own cemetery dedicated to Veteran burials, called the LPF National Field of Honour, in Pointe Claire, Quebec.

VAC is not presently involved in operating or funding the LPF National Field of Honour; however, the Department invested approximately \$1.57M in grave marker maintenance at the cemetery from 2018-19 to 2022-23. This was part of the five-year, \$24.4M commitment announced in Budget 2018 for Veteran grave marker maintenance. Additionally, VAC has provided funding through the Commemorative Partnership Program to support ceremonies at the cemetery and repairs to the Gate of Remembrance. The Department also supports community war memorial projects for LPF branches across the country.

In March 2020, the LPF wrote to the Minister of Veterans Affairs requesting that VAC "take steps to add the National Field of Honour to the other military cemeteries in Canada which it already owns and operates." The LPF proposes a gratuitous transfer of ownership of the cemetery and a transfer of any remaining funds in their Perpetual Care Fund (estimated at \$900K in January 2025).

As part of its due diligence on this request, VAC sought assistance from Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to conduct a review of the site to determine the investment required to bring it into compliance with regulations for Crown properties. The site assessment took place from 2021 to 2023 and included site operations and management, health and safety, accessibility, heritage and the environment. The final report for this phase was received by VAC in January 2024.

In May 2024, a member of parliament, opened a petition for signature to call upon the Government of Canada to consider making "a full public commitment in 2024 to assume oversight, management and funding of the Last Post Fund National Field of Honour." The response tabled on 18 November 2024 indicated that VAC will continue working with the LPF to ensure the National Field of Honour remains an appropriate and respectful final resting place for Veterans for many years to come.

VAC continues to conduct due diligence. In 2025-26, PSPC is undertaking the following work: phase three of the environmental assessment, geomatics (survey plan), archaeological opinion, market value appraisal, title search (conducted by Justice Canada), hazardous materials evaluation and water analysis and well inspections. The work is expected to be completed by December 2025

LPF has assured the Department that they would provide their support as needed to facilitate the process. Likewise, VAC reiterated the commitment to keep LPF apprised of any new developments and we work towards ensuring the NFOH remains a respectful final resting place for Veterans.

SITUATION IN UKRAINE

- Canada is among Ukraine’s staunchest supporters on the world stage, and our two countries have deep and long-standing bilateral ties. Canada has provided strong support for Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and reform efforts.
- The Government of Canada signed the Agreement on Security Cooperation between Canada and Ukraine with the Government of Ukraine in February 2024.
- Veterans Affairs Canada contributed to this agreement and is responsible for two of the objectives:
 - sharing strategies, standards, frameworks, and best practices for supporting Veterans; and
 - sharing expertise, evidence, and guidance in the implementation of programs and services for Veterans of war and family members.
- A subsequent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was created to support these objectives. The signing of this MoU took place on February 11, 2025, at the 2025 Invictus Games in Vancouver, BC. It was signed by the previous Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine.
- Veterans Affairs Canada established an internal Working Group in September 2024 that is poised to share strategies, frameworks, and best practices for Veterans of war and family members to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine.

- Veterans Affairs Canada provides services and benefits to Veterans who are injured or become ill while serving with the Canadian Armed Forces.
- Anyone who is injured or becomes ill as a result of circumstances unrelated to Canadian military service is not eligible for benefits.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Humanitarian and Casualty Overview

- **Civilian casualties:** As of June 2025, the UN reports at least 13,580 civilians killed and 34,115 wounded in Ukraine.
- **Military losses:** The UA Losses project (Ukraine) records 70,935 Ukrainian soldiers killed, with 64,995 missing and 6,087 captured. For Russian forces (excluding DPR/LPR), BBC and Mediazona document 124,832 confirmed killed up to August 2025.

Displacement & Population

- **Pre-war population:** Ukraine's population has declined significantly, from around 44 million (2021) to an estimated 33 million in 2025.
- **Refugees abroad:** As of mid-2025, over 6.9 million Ukrainians are registered refugees globally, with large numbers in Germany (~1.2 million), Poland (~1 million), and the Czech Republic (~400,000).
- **Internal displacement:** Approximately 4 million people remain displaced within Ukraine.

Economic & Infrastructure Impact

- **GDP contraction & recovery:** Ukraine's GDP shrank by ~28.8% in 2022, then rebounded with a 5.3% growth in 2023, and a ~13% increase in GDP per capita.
- **Economic damage:** Estimates suggest total damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and economy exceeds \$700 billion (per Ukrainian PM) or \$138 billion (KSE).
- **Sector performance:** In 2025, Ukraine's economy is projected to grow around 2.5%, signaling gradual recovery.

BACKGROUND

In February 2022, Ukraine invited foreign nationals to join its military in response to the Russian invasion. Since this time, citizens of a number of countries, including Canada, have reportedly travelled to Ukraine to be part of the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine.

Canada's Foreign Enlistment Act prohibits Canadians from enlisting in the military or navy of a foreign state at war with a friendly state. This means that in a conflict where Canada is neutral, Canadians cannot join the armed forces of a hostile party.

Global Affairs Canada continues to advise all Canadians against travel to Ukraine and Russia. As Global Affairs Canada's ability to provide consular services in Ukraine is severely limited, Canadians cannot depend on the Government of Canada to assist Canadians in leaving Ukraine.

Anyone who is injured or becomes ill as a result of circumstances unrelated to service with the Canadian Armed Forces is not eligible for Veterans Affairs Canada benefits. This includes the current situation in Ukraine.

The Government of Canada has not provided services and benefits to Canadians who served in past conflicts where Canada was not a participant (i.e. Vietnam War, Spanish Civil War and American Civil War). Five Eyes Veterans Affairs' partners have confirmed they are not providing benefits to citizens, including Veterans, who join the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine.

Any impacts on Veteran benefits and services will be assessed on a case by case basis as Veterans who travel to Ukraine come forward.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING (MAiD)

- Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is not a Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) service. It is a deeply personal medical decision between a patient and their health care provider. VAC employees have no role or mandate to raise or recommend it.
- Our focus remains on supporting Veterans and their families with dignity and respect.
- Our employees are trained to refer Veterans who inquire about MAiD to their primary health care provider, and to focus solely on ensuring Veterans and their families are aware of the full range of benefits and supports available to them.
- Veterans Affairs Canada is aware of court action filed related to Medical Assistance in Dying. It would be inappropriate for the Department to comment further on any details.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Remedial actions

- Comprehensive investigation launched in August 2022.
- Review of 402,000 client files across three systems dating back to 2016.
- Confirmed four inappropriate cases, all involving a single employee. Employee is no longer with the Department.
- Mandatory training on MAiD implemented for all staff.
- Ongoing reminders and directives issued to front line staff.

Litigation involving MAiD

- Two lawsuits filed against VAC since January 2018 related to MAiD.
- One lawsuit has been settled; terms are confidential.
- One lawsuit is ongoing.

Scope of MAiD

- Responsibility lies with provincial/territorial health systems.
- Administered by physicians or nurse practitioners, in accordance with federal safeguards.
- Not a VAC program or service.

BACKGROUND

Concerns about Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) first came to light in August 2022, when the Department learned of an incident in which an employee inappropriately raised the topic of MAiD with a Veteran. VAC immediately took action by apologizing to the Veteran, launching a comprehensive investigation, and putting safeguards in place to prevent this from happening again.

VAC reviewed over 402,000 unique client files across three systems, dating back to 2016. This review confirmed four cases of inappropriate MAiD discussions, all involving the same employee. This evidence showed this was not a systemic issue, but an isolated case. The employee is no longer with the Department.

Following the investigation, VAC strengthened its guidance and oversight. Mandatory training on MAiD was introduced for all staff, along with clear directives that employees must not raise or recommend MAiD under any circumstances. Regular reminders are also issued to front-line staff to reinforce these expectations.

MAiD is not a VAC program or service. Decisions about MAiD fall within provincial and territorial health care systems and are administered by physicians or nurse practitioners under federal safeguards. VAC employees have no mandate to recommend or discuss MAiD. Their role is to support Veterans by ensuring they are aware of the full range of benefits, programs and community resources available, and to refer any inquiries about the Veteran's primary care provider.

VETERANS REVIEW AND APPEAL BOARD DECISIONS

- The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal that operates at arm's length from Veterans Affairs Canada and from me as Minister. The Minister does not—and cannot—interfere in its decisions.
- The Board's high rate of favourable decisions reflects its mandate to give Veterans every benefit of the doubt, as required by law. This includes considering new medical evidence, changes in policy, and personal testimony from Veterans themselves.
- Many favourable decisions are not reversals of VAC decisions, but increases in benefits for conditions that were already recognized. This shows the system is working to ensure Veterans receive the full support they are entitled to.
- The Board's decisions are guided by legislation, legal precedent, and a robust quality assurance framework. Veterans also have access to free legal representation to help them navigate the appeal process.
- Ultimately, the Board exists to ensure fairness and justice for Veterans. Its independence is a cornerstone of that mission, and I fully support its role in delivering that accountability.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Veterans Review and Appeal Board

- The Board provides Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP members and their families with an independent appeal process for disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada.
- The Board operates at arm's length from the Department to ensure a fair and independent appeal process for applicants.
- Veterans who are not satisfied with a VAC decision have the right to two levels of redress at the Board: A Review Hearing and an Appeal Hearing.
- In 2024-25, the Board received 9,412 applications and held a total of 6,123 hearings. This past year, 89% of Veterans who had cases heard received additional benefits for their service-related disabilities.

Benefit of the Doubt

- The "benefit of the doubt" section of the legislation has been interpreted by the Federal Court of Canada in multiple decisions that inform the Board's application of this principle.

Open Court Principle

- The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is bound by the open court principle, which ensures transparency and accountability.

Hearings are open to the public, and decisions are published on the Canadian Legal Information Institute website. Applicants involved in a Board decision have the right to seek further redress, including judicial review by the Federal Court of Canada.

BACKGROUND

All Board Members are appointed through a competitive process administered by the Privy Council Office. They are mandated to provide fair, impartial, quasi-judicial hearings and decisions on disability benefit matters.

With regards to partial entitlement, Veterans Affairs Canada adopted a consistent approach in 2018 to ensure fairness and equity for Veterans in similar circumstances. The Board has the authority to reconsider decisions in cases involving an error of fact or law, or when new evidence is presented. Significant changes in VAC policy that benefit Veterans are addressed under this provision, and the resulting decision speak for themselves.

The "benefit of the doubt" section of the legislation has been interpreted by the Federal Court of Canada in multiple decisions that inform the Board's application of this principle.

The Board's program is governed by the [Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act](#). It is an independent administrative tribunal that operates at arm's length from Veterans Affairs Canada. The Chairperson of the Board is accountable for delivering the Appeal program and reports directly to Parliament through the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Board Members preside over all levels of redress. A robust quality assurance program supports them in ensuring decisions are consistent with the Board's legislated mandate, prior Board decisions, and Federal Court jurisprudence.

Favourability:

- With respect to favourability rates, as outlined in the Board's mandate, the Board has full and exclusive jurisdiction to hear, determine, and deal with all applications for review and appeal that may be made to the Board under the [Pension Act](#), the [Veterans Well-being Act - Part 3](#), the [War Veterans Allowance Act](#) and other Acts of Parliament.
- The Board may overturn decisions made by VAC for several reasons, including the presentation of new or updated medical evidence or changes in VAC policy. A key feature of the Board's appeal program is that Veterans may appear before Board Members to explain how their illness or injury is related to their service and how it affects their daily life. This personal testimony allows Board Members to ask clarifying questions and gain a deeper understanding of each case. Additionally, when appealing to the Board, Veterans have the advantage of accessing free legal representation through the Bureau of Pensions Advocates to support them through the appeal process.

It is important to note that the Board's favourability rates do not only reflect cases where VAC decisions were overturned. About one third of favourable decisions result from

increases in the assessment of an already-entitled condition. For example, if a Veteran received a favourable decision from VAC but appealed for a higher assessment, a resulting increase would be considered a favourable Board decision. These decisions are based on medical evidence presented to the Board.

BURN PIT EXPOSURE

- Over 4,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the Persian Gulf Region between 1990-1991, and over 40,000 served in the Afghanistan theatre of operations between 2001-2014.
- Burn pits were commonly used on allied bases during these deployments to eliminate various types of waste, due to lack of proper waste disposal facilities and security concerns associated with their establishment.
- Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans have raised concerns about burn pit exposure during service in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, and are advocating for research into how the health effects of burn pits are impacting Canadian soldiers and Veterans years later.
- Veterans Affairs Canada considers each case individually, based on the specific circumstances and available evidence, and encourages any Veteran or still-serving member with a disability they feel is related to their service, to apply for VAC's suite of programs, including rehabilitation, health benefits, financial support, and disability benefits.
- Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence continue to monitor international research on the issue.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

The United States

- In August 2022, the United States introduced the PACT Act, a law expanding Veterans Affairs health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, and other toxic substances.
- Veterans Affairs Canada's existing legislation entitles for disability, healthcare and rehabilitation benefits individuals with disabilities related to their service.

Long-term Health Impacts of Burn Pit Exposures on Veterans

- VAC has previously examined mortality rates of Veterans deployed to the Persian Gulf, some of whom were also exposed to burn pits. No difference was observed between Veterans who were deployed versus those not deployed.
- VAC closely follows ongoing international initiatives to understand and characterize relationships between burn pits and Veteran health. VAC also leads a Five Eyes Veteran Research Committee Working Group on Military Occupational Exposures and is well connected to member countries' Defence and Veteran administrations on this topic.

Present Day Usage of Burn Pits

- Every effort is made to avoid the use of burn pits as a means of waste disposal. The use of open-air burn pits may continue as a short-term solution during contingency operations where no alternative is feasible. For the longer term, incinerators, engineered landfills, or other accepted solid waste management practices are required to be used whenever feasible.

Collection of Military Exposure Data

- VAC recognizes that objective, individual-level information on military exposures, preferably collected over the course of an individual's career, is ideal to inform strong population health research regarding questions of causality for Veterans, as well as CAF health protection measures to minimize exposures and health impacts moving forward.
- The Department of National Defence is currently working to develop an electronic repository of exposure data, called the Force Health Protection Information Management System (FHPIMS). The intent of this electronic system is to track exposure data for CAF personnel at the individual level over time.

BACKGROUND

Current and Planned Research Initiatives:

Information on burn pit exposures during deployment is not consistently tracked or reported in individual CAF service records, nor is it stored in a searchable format. Consequently, neither VAC nor DND are able to use this information for research purposes.

VAC leads and monitors various research initiatives to understand the health impacts of burn pits and other military exposures:

- VAC and DND are collaborating on the Canadian Forces Cancer and Mortality Study (CF-CAMS), a unique 40-year longitudinal cohort of CAF active-duty members and Veterans. The research team is exploring associations between occupational history and cancer incidence in CAF personnel and Veterans, which may provide insights into the effects of deployment and related exposures, such as burn pits.
- VAC leads a Five Eyes Veteran Research Committee Working Group on Military Exposures and is well connected to member countries' Defence and Veteran administrations on this topic.
- VAC closely follows ongoing international initiatives to understand and characterize relationships between burn pits and Veteran health. This includes regular attendance at meetings of the US Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (scope includes burn pit exposures and impacts on Veteran health), and monitoring of the Australian Repatriation Medical Authority's Statements of Principles, which set out factors that link military service to certain medical conditions, including exposures related to burn pits.

VAC Exposure Disability Benefit Adjudication:

VAC's determination of disability benefit eligibility related to burn pit exposure is done on a case-by-case basis, with the determination being made on the individual merits of each case, and based on the evidence available.

There is a VAC policy framework to provide guidance for assessing disability compensation requests pertaining to specific medical conditions and/or hazardous material exposure. The framework consists of two policies:

1. [Assessing and Categorizing Health-Related Expert Opinion\(s\) and Scientific Evidence](#), providing guidance on assessing and categorizing scientific evidence, and a clear evidence threshold standard; and
2. [Hazardous Material and Radiation Exposure](#), providing guidance to Disability Adjudicators on how to interpret evidence, including expert opinion, in the case of hazardous material exposure.

Together, these policies provide for a consistent and transparent approach to these claim types.

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- When Veterans apply for a disability benefit for a mental health condition, Veterans Affairs Canada wants them to have access to the mental health support they need, when they need it.
- The Mental Health Benefit automatically qualifies Veterans for mental health coverage while they wait for a decision on their application.
- This benefit gives CAF Veterans up to two years of coverage for treatment for conditions such as anxiety and depressive disorders, or trauma-and-stressor-related disorders.
- Since the program was launched on April 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025, we have supported over 27,000 Veterans through the Mental Health Benefit.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- 27, 057 CAF Veterans were approved for the Mental Health Benefit since April 1, 2022.
- The goal is to support Veterans' mental health while their disability benefits application is being processed.
- Coverage will last for two years from the date we receive a disability benefits application or until a Veteran receives a favourable disability benefits decision.
- The coverage allows VAC to pay for mental health services, delivered either in person or virtually.
- Mental Health Benefits covers the following mental health care and services:
 - Prescription drugs prescribed by health professionals authorized in the province or territory in which the pharmaceuticals are provided, or in the country in which the client resides, and
 - Treatment and examinations provided by psychologists, psychotherapists, addictions counsellors, social workers, clinical care manager services or other health professionals approved by the Minister.
- Mental Health Benefits has the same financial and frequency thresholds currently applicable to Veterans Affairs Canada's Treatment Benefits program. This ensures a seamless transition to the Treatment Benefits program.
- Mental Health Benefits do not include reimbursement of health related travel expenses, cannabis for medical purposes, in-patient treatment care, or coverage for physician care where it is covered by the Canadian Armed Forces or the respective provincial or territorial health insurance plan.

BACKGROUND

On April 1, 2022, the Department implemented the Mental Health Benefits allowing eligible CAF Veterans to obtain coverage for health services needed for mental health conditions such as trauma-and-stressor-related disorders, anxiety disorders and depressive disorders.

This coverage starts immediately following their application for a disability entitlement as long as the application indicates they are experiencing a mental health problem, they have CAF Service and they have signed attesting to the truth of the information provided. Coverage could last up to two years or until their disability entitlement decision is granted.

Eligibility for Mental Health Benefits does not alter eligibility for other benefits, services or care under the [Veteran Health Care Regulations](#) or other departmental programs for which the Veteran already holds eligibility. Veterans currently receiving treatment benefits, including mental health benefits, will continue to receive them – this initiative does not affect these benefits.

The Mental Health Benefits provides coverage for prescription drugs as well as treatments and examinations provided by psychologists, counsellors, social workers, or other mental health professionals approved by the Minister.

The Mental Health Benefits are directly linked to VAC's mandate to support the well-being of Veterans.

From April 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025, 27,057 CAF Veterans were approved for the Mental Health Benefit. Of those, 9,810 distinct applicants have made at least one claim to Medavie Blue Cross since April 2022.

Veterans who were made eligible for Mental Health Benefits and have received an unfavorable disability benefits decision, will be notified that their Mental Health Benefits are ending.

To allow Veteran's time to prepare, they will be contacted by the Department in advance of their Mental Health Benefits ending to assist in preparing for next steps and/or finding other available resources.

Although Mental Health Benefits coverage is ending, coverage that may already be in place for other approved health conditions under the Treatment Benefits program will continue.

SERVICE DOGS

- The Government recognizes that there is great interest in using service dogs to assist Veterans with physical and mental health conditions.
- In June 2022, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs released their report “*Incorporating Service Dogs into the Rehabilitation Program of Veterans Affairs Canada*”. Among the Committee’s recommendations, Veterans Affairs Canada was asked to take into consideration the work currently underway in a five-year service dog training pilot program by the United States Veterans Administration, once a national standard is in place in Canada.
- The Department continues to review and monitor emerging research and evidence with respect to the use of psychiatric service dogs including any future change in policy direction by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Efforts to develop a nationally recognized Canadian standard for service dogs were not successful as a national consensus could not be reached.
- The Government expanded the Medical Expense Tax Credit in 2018 through which expenses for specially trained service animals may be claimed.
- This tax credit is available for eligible Canadians, including Veterans.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- Veterans Affairs Canada provides support for a variety of mental health treatments for a range of mental health conditions. Our treatment benefits do not consider psychiatric service dogs to be a recognized mental health treatment.
- While emotional support animals, including emotional support dogs, may provide beneficial companionship to owners, VAC does not fund expenses for these animals.

BACKGROUND

The Department is aware of the interest in psychiatric service dogs and the potential they may have to assist those suffering from mental health conditions. Our goal is to provide Veterans access to evidence-based, safe and effective health benefits. Currently, there is insufficient evidence to support the efficacy of these psychiatric service dogs as a mental health treatment.

VAC continues to review and monitor its approach regarding psychiatric service dogs. The Department is always looking at ways to improve its support for Veterans based on available evidence.

Veterans Affairs Canada:

In 2015 the Department funded a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of psychiatric service dogs for Veterans with PTSD. While 31 Veterans were recruited, only 18 Veteran participants completed the pilot study over the course of an 18-month period. The findings of this study were limited.

In 2019, the Department provided funding through the Veteran Family and Well-being Fund to Wounded Warriors Canada to support their development of a PTSD service dog certification program.

United States Veterans Affairs:

VAC is interested in the United States PAWS pilot (Puppies Assisting Wounded Service members) announced in August 2021 which was approved and funded by Congress. The pilot program began in late Summer 2022 and is being conducted over a 5-year period administered through five US Veterans Affairs (USVA) medical centre sites. USVA has put together a service dog training model, which will have Veterans engage in both basic obedience and other training of a dog, so the dog may become a service dog for another individual.

VAC has consulted with the USVA about their research and policy direction to inform what may be done in Canada. VAC continues to review emerging research to determine its approach in regard to psychiatric service dogs, including any change in policy direction by the USVA. VAC will review findings and best practices from the study and will determine if there is applicability for VAC in the Canadian context.

Australia's Rehabilitation Appliances Program:

While Australia's Department of Veterans Affairs began a 4-year study of service dogs and Veterans with PTSD in 2019, it decided not to wait for the results. In 2022, DVA Australia began providing psychiatric service dogs to carefully screened Veterans with PTSD under its Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program to help meet their clinical recovery goals. VAC will monitor with interest the outcomes of Australia's adopted practice to provide psychiatric service dogs to eligible Veterans with PTSD.

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

In June 2022, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) tabled its report “[Incorporating Service Dogs Into the Rehabilitation Program of Veterans Affairs Canada \(publications.gc.ca\)](#)”. Six recommendations request the involvement of VAC or the Government of Canada. VAC provided the [Government Response](#) which was tabled in October 2022.

Other activity involving the Department:

In late 2024, a petition related to service dogs was introduced in the House of Commons. Petition e-4950, presented by Elizabeth May on October 28, 2024, relates to OSI/PTSD service dogs and called on the Department to provide critical funding in a timely manner to those vulnerable Veterans with service dogs. VAC tabled a Government Response on December 11, 2024.

A second petition, e-5277, presented by then Member of Parliament, Rachel Blaney, supported the adoption of Private Members Bill C-417 which sought to have the Minister develop and implement a framework for assistance animals for Veterans with disabilities. The Bill had received first reading on November 5, 2024, prior to Parliament being prorogued on January 6, 2025.

CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

- Since 2016, Veterans Affairs Canada has reimbursed cannabis for medical purposes, ensuring access is safe, controlled, and based on medical authorization by the healthcare professional directly involved in the Veteran's care.
- Our approach continues to evolve as new scientific research and medical guidelines emerge.
- To ensure the safety and well being of Veterans we are strengthening oversight, updating policy, and working with Health Canada as it reviews the *Cannabis Act*.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Cannabis for Medical Purposes Policy

- Established in 2016, with reimbursements set at up to \$8.50 per gram, capped at 3 grams/day unless exception criteria are met.
- Exceptional approvals allowed up to 10 grams/day with documentation from a medical specialist.

Program Demographics

- 27,643 Veterans reimbursed in 2024/25
 - 7.5% reimbursed for less than 3 grams/day
 - 61.4% reimbursed for 3 grams/day
 - 23.6% reimbursed for over 3 grams/day
- Top 5 authorized conditions
 - PTSD (47.79%)
 - Chronic Pain (46.86%)
 - Depressive Disorder (12.79%)
 - Tinnitus (11.04%)
 - Anxiety Disorder (10.04%)

Program Expenditures

- \$244.6M reimbursed in 2024/25
 - \$191.7M in 2023/24
- Forecasted to exceed \$300M by 2026, plus an additional \$12M in transactional costs.

BACKGROUND

VAC implemented the Cannabis for Medical Purposes Reimbursement Policy in November 2016. The reimbursement policy established a limit of three grams per day for dried cannabis or its equivalent in other forms up to a maximum reimbursement rate which is currently set at \$8.50 per gram.

An exceptional approval process was developed as part of the reimbursement policy to assist Veterans who may require more than three grams per day. To add more rigour to this approach, these reimbursement requests may only be approved when supporting documentation is provided from a medical specialist with expertise in the Veteran's diagnosed condition(s).

The policy further explains the information to be included in the supporting documentation from the medical specialist. The following are the four requirements:

- a) the medical rationale for the use of cannabis for medical purposes for the Veteran's condition(s);
- b) the specific quantity over three grams per day being recommended;
- c) a list of contraindications that were considered and confirmed absent; and
- d) a list of alternative treatments that were tried and why they were ineffective or contraindicated.

Health Canada's Cannabis Act and Cannabis Regulations (2018): legalized recreational cannabis. VAC does not reimburse recreational purchases, all cannabis products used for medical purposes must be purchased from federal licensed sellers authorized by Health Canada.

Amendments to Schedule 4 of the Cannabis Act (2019): Updated to include edibles, extracts, and topicals, in addition to dried and fresh cannabis.

VAC has continued to respond to changes and have expanded coverage to include edibles, extracts, and topicals to align with change to the *Cannabis Act*.

Internal Audit (2022): Found rapid program growth, high-dose authorizations, and a small number of prescribers. The audit called for stronger oversight and monitoring.

Cannabis Act and Regulations Review (2025): VAC is collaborating with Health Canada during the review of the *Cannabis Act and Regulations*. Any modifications will be reflected in the Reimbursement Policy for Cannabis for Medical Purposes as appropriate.

TRANSITION SERVICES

- Veterans Affairs Canada is proud to work hand-in-hand with the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP to make the journey to life after service as smooth and supported as possible.
- Each year, 7800 military members release from the Canadian Armed Forces. Our goal is simple: deliver a transition experience that's standardized, personalized, and professional—empowering CAF and RCMP members, Veterans, and their families at each step of their journey.
- We have improved how we connect with Veterans including enhancing digital tools, promoting early registration on My VAC Account, and raising awareness of the supports available.
- These initiatives and more are making it easier throughout the process to focus on what matters most—supporting the well-being of those who've served and their families.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Life After Service Survey 2019

- 39% of Regular Force Veterans reported difficulties adjusting to post-service life
- 33% of Veterans reported that their families experienced difficulty adjusting to post-service life

CAF Release Statistics

- On average, 7,800 military members release from the CAF each year (10-year average)
 - 2,000 are medical releases
 - 5,800 are non-medical releases
- In FY 24/25, 8,918 military members released from the CAF.
 - 2,486 were medical releases
 - 6,432 were non-medical releases
- In FY 23/24, 6,132 military members released from the CAF.
 - 1,700 were medical releases
 - 4,432 were non-medical releases

Transition Interviews

- Transition Interviews Finalized in FY 24/25: 5,569
- Transition Interviews Finalized – YTD (as of Jun 30): 1,471

Transition Centres

- VAC staff has a full or part time presence in all 27 CAF Transition Centres and 5 satellite locations, located on Bases/Wings across the country.
- Provision of transition support through transition interviews for more than 20 years.
- Integrated presence since 2009
- Enhanced Transition Services for medically releasing implemented in 2015
- Military to Civilian Transition process for non-medically releasing implemented nationally in 2024.

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada began providing a form of transition assistance on Canadian Forces Bases and Wings in 2003. Since that time, we have continued to develop and improve our service delivery model in response to the needs of transitioning Canadian Armed Forces Members and their families.

A Transition Interview with wellness screening is available to all releasing Regular and Reserve Force CAF members, RCMP and families of both groups. A transition interview is administered to members up to six months prior to release. The Transition Interview provides an opportunity to:

- Screen for potential risks and/or barriers which may impact a member's successful transition to life after service;
- Determine the level of support/intervention required from VAC and other community support systems to address identified unmet need(s);
- Provide members and their families with information about or access to the full range of VAC, programs, services and benefits

During the interview, a screening tool is used and can be administered again at various points in time to identify potential risk level, unmet needs and concerns. This tool was developed using the domains of well-being and is evidence based. Low risk clients typically are able to self-manage and do not require ongoing support. Many clients identified as moderate risk may benefit from guided support and ongoing monitoring for a brief period of time. High risk clients may benefit from some type of further assessment (ie. case management or health professional) and more intensive and ongoing monitoring and follow up.

Enhanced Transition Services is a joint CAF-VAC process to support medically releasing CAF members and their families. It provides joint case consultation and coordinated case planning to support a successful and seamless transition to civilian life. This was implemented in 2015.

The new Military to Civilian Transition process addresses the gap within the CAF between medically and non-medically releasing members, and provides a standardized, personalized and professional transition process for non-medically releasing members and their families. VAC staff, CAF transition advisors and Military Family Services staff support the transitioning members by jointly offering assistance and transition planning. National implementation is complete as of March 2024.

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT SURVIVORS

- Veterans Affairs Canada offers a full range of programs and supports for those injured or ill in the line of service – including those impacted by military sexual trauma
- VAC is working closely with the Department of National Defence’s Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre (SMSRC) to enhance supports for those affected. Working with people with lived experience, a MST Peer Support Program was developed and launched in June 2021, offering formal and informal groups, as well as peer support activities. These programs continue today with over 29 sessions completed since the launch.
- These efforts align with the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and support culture change in the Canadian Armed Forces.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Heyder-Beattie Class Action

- 23,969 claims approved for payment (per Court-appointed Claims Administrator).
- VAC created a Dedicated Unit (May 25, 2020) to process related applications on a priority basis.
- Unit continues to adjudicate sexual trauma claims (CAF/RCMP).
- Between June 1, 2020 – August 20, 2025: 5,302 applications adjudicated, 94% favourability rate.

Peer Support Program – Consultations

- Co-developed with Persons With Lived and Living Experience (PWLLE) using a human-centred design.
- Fall 2021: consultations helped shape program; [report](#) published March 29, 2022.
- Ongoing feedback: post-session surveys + exit interviews guide updates.
- May 2024: SMSRC Partnerships Team conducted six community consultations; summary report shared with project team in November 2024.
- June–July 2024: four virtual information sessions were conducted open to the public and community members (English & French, with live Q&A).

Current Peer Support Services

- **Formal Peer Support Group:** Up to ten 90-minute virtual sessions, co-facilitated by a trained peer supporter with lived experience and a mental health professional. Structured educational materials guide discussion on trauma, moral injury, coping, and self-care.
- **Informal Peer Support Group:** Up to eight 75–90-minute virtual drop-in sessions led by trained peer supporters with lived experience. Topics are flexible and driven by participant needs. Focusing on peer connection and mutual support.
- **Peer Support Activities:** A variety of casual peer support activities help participants connect (e.g., art therapy, virtual coffee chats, seasonal events).

Peer Support Impact

- **86%** of participants in FY2023/24 **would recommend** the peer support sessions.

Training & Support

- All peer supporters and mental health professionals' complete orientation training on peer support, trauma-informed care, crisis management, and self-care, led by VAC staff.

BACKGROUND

Under a clear mandate from Budget 2021, VAC is working with the Department of National Defence (DND) to ensure Veterans affected by Military Sexual Trauma (MST) have timely access to support. This includes peer support programs and services offered through DND's Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Center (SMSRC).

Core Supports for Veterans

VAC prioritizes the well-being of Veterans and their families. Current supports include:

- **Access to SMSRC services** – confidential 24-7 phone line and ongoing assistance.
- **VAC Assistance Service** – one to one mental health support, free of charge, available 24/7, 365 days a year.
- **Operational Stress Injury (OSI) Clinics** – 10 outpatient Operational Stress Injury (OSI) and 11 OSI satellite service sites with multi-disciplinary teams specializing in military-related trauma.
- **National Provider network** – access to VAC registered mental health professionals across Canada.

Veterans or CAF members with MST-related health conditions, such as PTSD or depression, are encouraged to apply for VAC disability benefits. A dedicated unit processes these claims. Veterans in Canada applying for certain mental health conditions automatically qualify for up to two years of mental health coverage while their application is processed.

Targeted Initiatives

VAC and DND are collaborating to expand MST-specific supports, including:

- **Office of Women and 2SLGBTQI+** (established March 2020) – advancing gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Access to SMSRC supports** (since December 2021) – complementing VAC benefits and compensation for service-related MST.
- **Peer Support Program** – co-developed in response to the CAF-DND Sexual Misconduct *Heyder-Beattie* Class Action settlement:
 - 11 Formal Groups completed (As of August 2025)
 - 5 Informal Groups delivered (May 2024 – August 2025)
 - 13 Peer Support Activities held (July 2024 – July 2025)

VETERAN AND FAMILY WELL-BEING FUND

- Veterans Affairs Canada fosters strong collaboration and supports innovation through the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund.
- The Fund provides \$3 million annually in grants and contributions to organizations striving to improve the well-being of Veterans and their families through innovative projects, initiatives and research. Since 2018, the Fund has awarded \$57M to 150 initiatives.
- Eligible organizations include private, public, academic and Indigenous organizations.
- The 2024-2025 Call for Applications for the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund resulted in twenty seven organizations being selected for funding for a total of \$14.4 million over four years.
- These organizations strive to improve the lives of Veterans and their families in areas such as homelessness, retraining, employment, mental health, and research. They also place emphasis on supporting women, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, as well as their families.
- All available funding for the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund has been fully committed for 2025-2026. As a result, a new Call for Applications is not anticipated at this time.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Overall Impact

- Since 2018, the Fund has awarded \$57M to 150 initiatives.
- Demand remains high: 839 applications received, requesting \$615M in total.
- All funding is committed until 2028–29.

Historical Calls for Applications

- 2018–19: 155 applications → 21 projects, \$7.6M (5 years).
- 2019–20: 114 applications → 22 projects, \$7.2M (5 years).
- 2020–21: 142 applications → 23 projects, \$10.4M (5 years).
- 2021–22: 98 applications → 36 projects, \$11.3M (3 years).
- 2022–23: 120 applications → 21 projects, \$6M (3 years).
- 2024–25: 210 applications → 27 projects, \$14.4M (4 years).

Funding by Theme (2018-2025)*

- Mental Health: 20%
- Retraining/Employment: 17.9%
- Research: 15.2%
- Homelessness: 14.9%
- Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans: 13.1% (Women: 7.8%; 2SLGBTQI+: 5.3%)
- Families: 12.7%
- Indigenous Veterans: 6.2%

** Projects funded through the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund often address multiple areas of need. This breakdown reflects the primary theme identified for each project.*

BACKGROUND

Each year Veterans Affairs Canada receives numerous requests and proposals for funding from outside organizations in support of initiatives and projects that are aimed at improving the health and well-being of Veterans and their families. Many times, these proposals seek funding to conduct research or to develop, test, and implement new and innovative programs and services that focus on various sub-groups of Veterans Affairs Canada's target populations.

The Veteran and Family Well-being Fund provides a strategic approach to ensure that Veterans Affairs Canada has the capacity to support innovation in Veteran health and well-being, to prevent duplication of service and program delivery, as well as to fill gaps.

The Fund has been in place since 2018. It provides grants and contributions for organizations to conduct research and implement initiatives and projects that support the well-being of Veterans and their families.

All applications to the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund are evaluated against criteria such as project impact, innovation, addressing unmet needs, support for equity-deserving groups, and cost-effectiveness. Applications are first assessed by subject matter experts with specialized knowledge across eight key themes: homelessness, mental health, employment/transition, research, families, Indigenous Veterans, women Veterans and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. This thematic approach ensures that funding is directed toward a broad range of issues affecting Canadian Veterans.

In addition, by aligning funding with emerging priorities, the Fund remains responsive to the evolving needs of the Veteran community. For example, Budget 2021 allocated an additional \$15 million in grants over three years to fund projects that supported Veterans during the post COVID-19 recovery, with added emphasis on homelessness, employment and retraining, and women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. Budget 2024 provided an additional \$6 million over three years where thirty percent of the funding focused on projects for Indigenous, women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans.

An example of success is Team Rubicon's *The Veteran Pandemic Recovery Project*, a three year project funded by VFWF in 2020-2021. Designed to engage Veterans and their families in serving communities affected by COVID-19 and natural disasters, the project aimed to reduce the emergency management skills gap by building a sustainable Veteran-led humanitarian force. By its conclusion, the initiative had enrolled 503 Veterans as new volunteers and delivered operations and service projects in 79 communities across Canada, showcasing both the resilience of Veterans and the lasting impact of their service.

VETERANS SURVIVORS FUND

- Veterans’ spouses and common-law partners play a crucial role in caring for Veterans. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that those who served, and their survivors, have the support they need.
- In 2022, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs undertook a study to review restrictions in survivor pension benefits, commonly referred to as “Marriage after 60” provisions.
- Veterans Affairs Canada has worked with Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to learn about these survivors. The Department used the findings of this research to better understand how to support these survivors.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Veterans Survivors Fund

- \$150 million committed over five years in Budget 2019 to establish a Fund to “better support Veterans who married over the age of 60 and their spouses.”

Research into Size/Characteristics of Survivor Population

- Research by Statistics Canada received by VAC in 2021 showed:
 - As of 2018, there were an estimated 4,490 persons who:
 - had married or entered into a common-law relationship with a Veteran
 - and where the relationship began on or after the Veteran’s 60th birthday
 - and where the Veteran was in receipt of a CFSA pension
 - and where the Veteran had since passed away.
 - Of the 4,490 living survivors:
 - Virtually all were female,
 - Most (90%) were aged 70 or older,
 - Overall, their incomes were higher than other similarly aged Canadian females (i.e., median income of \$34,900 -vs- \$25,600).

BACKGROUND

It has been a long standing concern that spouses who marry Veterans after the Veteran turns 60 are not entitled to automatic survivor pensions under the *Canadian Forces Superannuation Act (CFSA)*.

- Budget 2019 committed to help survivors who entered into relationships with Veterans on or after the Veteran's 60th birthday with the financial support they need.
- If the *CFSA* recognized these surviving spouses, then survivors would not only receive pension benefits, but would also be entitled to coverage under the Public Service Health Care Plan and Pensioners Dental Care Plan.
- The responsibility for the *CFSA* lies with the Minister of National Defence.
- After age 60, Veterans can apply for the Optional Survivor Benefit to obtain coverage for new spouse who is otherwise ineligible. Under this arrangement, the Veteran opts to reduce their CAF superannuation pension payments (by 30% to 50%) in exchange for providing a future survivor pension to the new spouse, payable only if the Veteran passes away before their spouse.

In 2022, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) undertook a study to review restrictions in survivor pension benefits, including those in the *CFSA* and other related pension schemes. The study focused on the financial concerns of these survivors as well as possible impacts that the Veterans Survivors Fund may have. This report was presented to the House on December 14, 2022.

- This report included two recommendations on the Veterans Survivors Fund:
Recommendation #6: That Veterans Affairs Canada use the research and data provided by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to identify survivors and immediately distribute the \$150 million Veterans Survivors Fund, focusing on those most in financial need, and publicly provide the formula and calculations for the funding allotment.
Recommendation #8: That the Minister of Veteran Affairs work with the RCMP and the RCMP Veterans Association to ensure survivors of RCMP Veterans will receive an equitable portion of the Veterans Survivors Fund.
- A Government Response was tabled on March 30, 2023, for recommendations #6 and #8:
Recommendation #6: VAC is currently using the research and data provided by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to determine how best to support these survivors, including those who are most in financial need. Once this direction is confirmed, VAC will provide an update on the Veterans Survivors Fund.
Recommendation #8: VAC will work closely with the RCMP to explore options to

possibly include the survivors of former RCMP members as eligible recipients under the Veterans Survivors Fund.

CRITICAL INJURY BENEFIT

- The Government is fully committed to the health and well-being of Canadian Armed Forces members, Veterans and their families; this includes mental health.
- The Government places the highest priority on ensuring members, Veterans and their families have the support and services they need, when and where they need it.
- The Critical Injury Benefit provides a tax-free lump-sum of \$90,368.09 (2025 rate) to members and Veterans to recognize the immediate impact of the most severe and traumatic physical and mental health service-related injuries or diseases, regardless of whether they resulted in a permanent disability.
- The Critical Injury Benefit policy was updated as of December 21, 2023, to clarify the language that describes benefit eligibility, paying particular attention to descriptions of psychological injuries.
- The Critical Injury Benefit is designed to address a very specific need and is one of a range of benefits and services provided by VAC to support ill and injured Veterans. It is not intended to duplicate the Pain and Suffering Compensation which compensates for permanent disabilities.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Critical Injury Benefit

- From July 1, 2015, to March 31, 2024, the Critical Injury Benefit has been granted to 243 individuals.
- Between fiscal year 2021-22 and 2023-24, expenditures for the Critical Injury Benefit were approximately \$1.1 million per year.

Military Sexual Trauma

- When the Critical Injury Benefit policy was updated, it was clarified that a “sudden and single incident” may include an incident of sexual assault.
- The Critical Injury Benefit is not awarded for the incident alone but rather for the immediate and severe impacts the incident has on an individual. It is possible that two people could experience a similar incident but have different impacts so that one individual might receive the Critical Injury Benefit whereas the other may not.

BACKGROUND

The Critical Injury Benefit (CIB) came into force on July 1, 2015. It is a tax-free lump sum amount of \$90,368.09 (2025 rate) payable to members or Veterans that have sustained a severe and traumatic injury or developed an acute disease that is:

- Service-related,
- The result of a sudden single incident (after March 31, 2006), and
- Immediately caused a severe impairment and severe interference in their quality of life.

The program was designed to compensate only the most seriously injured members and Veterans for the immediate consequences of their severe and traumatic injuries – both physical and mental. It is very restrictive and designed to not duplicate the purpose of the Pain and Suffering Compensation which is to compensate for permanent disabilities (chronic conditions, e.g. hearing loss and PTSD).

There has been stakeholder criticism against the CIB as some believe that it is not available to members and Veterans with mental health injuries as the Regulatory criteria for a traumatic injury or an acute disease includes specific physical injuries such as amputations but no specific mental health injuries.

On October 27, 2022, the Entitlement Review Panel of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board reversed a Departmental decision and granted CIB entitlement to an applicant for their psychological injury. This decision highlighted the need for additional clarity with respect to how Parliament intended the CIB provisions to be applied (when the benefit was approved and funded) in situations where a mental health injury or illness is the primary cause of a severe impairment (chronic illness vs acute illness).

Veterans Affairs Canada published updates to the Critical Injury Benefit policy, effective December 21, 2023. These updates include:

- Clarifying that a member or Veteran suffering from a severe impairment and severe interference in quality of life would not be able to attend work;
- Updating the definition of “traumatic injury” to include a mental or psychological injury that occurs in response to a psychologically traumatic event;
- Expanding upon the definition of “sudden and single incident” to ensure traumatic events, such as: experiencing actual or threatened death, serious injury, or an incident of sexual assault; and witnessing incidents of a horrific nature are being considered;
- Clarifying how the term “immediately” should be applied in cases of psychological injuries – meaning that the severe impairment and severe interference in quality of life is evident in the acute or early stage of the traumatic injury which spans from the initial point of injury up to 7 days following the sudden and single incident; and

- Providing guidance based on what constitutes “complex treatment” in instances of mental health or psychological injury.

FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

- Veterans Affairs Canada recognizes the central-role families and caregivers play in supporting the well-being of Veterans.
- Eligible family members and survivors can access mental health treatments, health care benefits, and vocational assistance, as well as financial support.
- Whether it's the more than 1,900 caregivers receiving the Caregiver Recognition Benefit—a monthly, tax-free payment made directly to the caregiver.
- Or the support available through the Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Line or the Veteran Family program offered at one of the 32 Military Resource Centers nationwide, we are committed to ensuring that families get the support they need.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Caregiver Recognition Benefit (CRB)

- \$27.8M was distributed to CRB caregivers in 2024-25
- 1,928 caregivers are currently receiving CRB

Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS)

- 2,066 receiving services, which included 1,043 peers participating in group meetings.
- From 2001-2025 more than 20,000 received services.
- Veterans and family members represent 76% of Peers served by OSISS.

Veteran Family Program (VFP)

- 2,635 clients were serviced in 2024-2025
- 14,000 clients have been serviced by VFP since 2019

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) recognizes the important role families and caregivers play in supporting Veteran's well-being. To reduce the strain families may face, VAC provides a range of programs and services.

Policy Guidance: the 2022 *Guideline for Funding Mental Health Services Involving Family Members* ensures clarity on when family services are covered under Treatment Benefits and Rehabilitation Programs.

Mental Health Supports: Families may access counselling and therapy when needed for the Veteran's recovery, guided by the treating health professional. This includes family, couple, and group therapy.

Direct Supports:

- **Caregiver Recognition Benefit:** monthly tax-free payment of 1,239 to informal caregivers.
- **VAC Assistance Service:** confidential 24/7 mental health counselling
- **Operational Stress Injury Clinics(OSI Clinics) and Operational Stress Injury Support Services (OPSISS):** specialized clinical and peer support.
- **Veterans Family Program:** Access to the 32 Military Family Resource Centres nationwide. Including the family Information line and CFWMS.ca
- **Veteran Family Telemedicine Service:** one year of virtual health care access post release. This includes prescriptions and renewals, lab requisitions, doctor's notes, and specialist referrals.
- **Mental Health First Aid and online tools:** including PTSD Coach Canada, OSI Connect, Life Speak

Employment & Education Support:

- **Career Transition Services (CTS):** provides career counselling and coaching.
- **Vocational Assistance:** is available to spouses if the Veteran cannot participate in vocational rehabilitation.

Independence Supports:

- **Veterans Independence Program (VIP):** provides housekeeping and grounds maintenance to help survivors and dependents remain independent at home.

RECOGNITION

- As Canadians, we take immense pride in the service and sacrifice of the Canadian Armed Forces. Their unwavering commitment to our country and to global peace and security is a powerful reflection of our national values — courage, integrity, and honour.
- Recognition is not just a gesture; it is a vital part of how we express our gratitude and uphold the legacy of those who serve. It reinforces our collective identity and ensures that the contributions of our military personnel are never forgotten. Whether through commemorative events, public acknowledgements, or personal stories, recognition strengthens the bond between Canadians and those who defend our freedoms.
- At Veterans Affairs Canada, we have a unique responsibility and privilege to lead this recognition. By honouring service, we help foster national unity and pride, and we ensure that future generations understand the depth of sacrifice behind the peace we enjoy today.
- We will continue to find meaningful ways to recognize and commemorate. We will lead with purpose, and ensure that every act of remembrance reflects the respect and pride Canadians feel for the Canadian Armed Forces.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- Commemorative recognition programming being developed will allow VAC to:
 - Continue to honour Veterans at home and abroad, while expanding scope and reach to include a greater focus on underrepresented Veterans.
 - Provide the opportunity to drive commemorative programming within Canada, helping to foster National pride and unity.
- Actions to deliver on these commitments align with Canadians views, as per the “Attitudes Towards Remembrance and Veterans’ Week 2022: Survey of Canadians,” where:
 - 96% agreed that Canada’s Veterans and those who died in service should be recognized for their services to Canada.
 - 94% attributed importance to marking anniversaries related to military efforts in Canada
 - 86% attributed importance to marking anniversaries related to military efforts in Canada.

Women Veterans

- Although women have served with distinction across all branches of the CAF, their unique experiences and sacrifices have yet to be formally recognized through a dedicated national observance.
- In 2024, the Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs published their report, *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans* which included a series of recommendations to improve on the recognition of Canadian Women Veterans.
- The department is exploring approaches to better commemorate Women Veterans and to provide a meaningful platform to honour their contributions, highlight their distinct perspectives, and educate Canadians about the evolving role of women in uniform.

National War Memorial

The National War Memorial is a tribute to all who have worn or wear the uniform. To reinforce the message, the “In Service to Canada” inscription was added in 2014. While the “In Service to Canada” inscription was added to remind Canadians that the memorial is dedicated to all those who served and continue to serve, the message is not understood clearly.

- The Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada (stakeholder group) has requested that the Gulf War dates be inscribed on the National War Memorial. There are differing opinions among Veterans on recognizing conflicts on the memorial in addition to the five already inscribed and further consultation with stakeholders is needed.

BACKGROUND

VAC's mandate is to support the well-being of Veterans and their families and to promote recognition and remembrance of the achievements and sacrifices of those who served Canada in uniform. Feedback has shown that Veterans' well-being improves when they feel recognized and that VAC plays an important role in fostering this recognition.

In the past, commemorative programming was developed to focus primarily on the World Wars and as a result, modern-day, and under-represented Veterans have not felt recognized. This was identified during public consultations in 2021 to support creation of VAC's 10-year Strategic Plan for Commemoration, which revealed that Veterans, stakeholders and Canadians at large supported:

- recognizing efforts of the World Wars and Korean War, but noted the scope of remembrance should place greater emphasis on post-war conflicts, operations and service;
- recognizing and commemorating domestic operations such as the defence of North America, sovereignty protection, search and rescue, and emergency disaster relief; and,
- encouraging more interaction between Veterans and youth with a focus on active youth participation in commemorative events and activities.

Many younger individuals who served in the CAF often do not see themselves as Veterans. This may be due to a social perception of what a Veteran is (i.e., a 'traditional' Veteran of the World Wars or the Korean War).

Although women have served with distinction across all branches of the CAF, their unique experiences and sacrifices have yet to be formally recognized through a dedicated national observance.

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Consultations with Canadians, Veterans and experts are part of the next steps.

INDIGENOUS VETERANS

- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is committed to supporting and recognizing First Nation, Métis and Inuit Veterans, and advancing reconciliation by ensuring awareness and access to VAC programs and services.
- In 2023, VAC created the Indigenous Veterans Engagement Team, staffed by Indigenous Veterans and allies, which has conducted 150+ engagements with Veterans, families, and communities.
- Since 2017, VAC has carried out 12 annual outreach visits to northern and remote Indigenous communities, alongside ongoing partnerships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations.
- In February 2025, VAC signed a Letter of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations to advance joint priorities in engagement, outreach, and commemoration.
- The 2019 Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement with the Métis National Council provides eligible Second World War Métis Veterans and survivors with a \$20,000 recognition payment, and funds for commemorating Métis Veterans' contributions.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- The **2021 Census** was the first since 1971 to ask about military service. It counted **23,075 Indigenous Veterans**:
 - 10,950 First Nations
 - 10,440 Métis
 - 755 Inuk (Inuit)
 - 930 with other/multiple affiliations
- Indigenous Veterans made up **5.2% of all Veterans** in private households.

Funding

- **Commemorative Partnership Program** supports projects in Indigenous communities or commemorating Indigenous Veterans:
 - 2024-25: 41 projects – \$874,386
 - 2023-24: 31 projects – \$213,000
 - 2022-23: 27 projects – \$346,000
- **Budget 2024** added **\$6M over 3 years** to the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund, including support for Indigenous, women, and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans.
 - In 2024–25, **\$2.4M** was awarded to 4 Indigenous-focused projects:
 - Southern Chiefs’ Organization Inc. – \$1,000,000
 - Manitoba Métis Federation – \$400,000
 - Métis National Council – \$400,000
 - Assembly of First Nations – \$600,000

Engagement

- **Indigenous Veterans Team** created in spring 2023; conducting outreach with communities nationwide.
- Working with the **Assembly of First Nations Veterans Council** under Letters of Understanding (April 2023 and February 2025).
- Building stronger relationships with **Métis and Inuit Veterans**.

BACKGROUND

Canada's Indigenous Peoples—First Nations, Métis, and Inuit—have a long and proud military tradition. An estimated **12,000 Indigenous people** served voluntarily in the two World Wars, with at least **500 losing their lives**. Recognizing this service is central to VAC's commemorative efforts, including learning materials for schools, exhibits at Vimy and Beaumont-Hamel, and Indigenous inclusion in national and international ceremonies. Monuments such as the **National Aboriginal Veterans Monument** (Ottawa) and the **Francis Pegahmagabow Monument** (Parry Sound) honour these contributions.

In **March 2021**, the **Commemorative Partnership Program (CPP)** was updated to allow Indigenous communities to receive up to **100% reimbursement (max \$50,000)** for war memorial projects.

VAC also supports Indigenous Veterans' health through the **Indigenous Veterans Health Project** with Indigenous Services Canada, offering culturally safe mental wellness services. These include:

- **Cultural and Emotional Supports** (Traditional Healers, Elders, land-based healing, peer support)
- **Mental Health Counselling** for Survivors of Residential/Day Schools, families, and those affected by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people
- **Transportation assistance** when services are not locally available

For Métis Veterans specifically, the **2019 Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution Agreement (\$30M)**, administered by the **Métis National Council**, recognizes Second World War Métis Veterans with payments and commemorative initiatives. As of June 2021, **75 payments** had been issued. The MNC also launched a **Commemorative Program** in 2021.

The Métis National Council, once comprising five governing members (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC), has undergone shifts:

- 2021 – Manitoba Métis Federation withdrew
- 2022 – Métis National Council leadership pursued legal action over fiduciary breaches (VAC not a party)
- 2024 – BC and Saskatchewan withdrew

Today, the Métis National Council consists of the Métis Nation of Ontario and Otipemisiwak Métis Government (Alberta).

Meanwhile, the **National Métis Veterans Council**—supported by the Métis National Council but non-political— continues to represent Veterans from Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, and the Northwest Territories. VAC remains committed to working with the Métis National Council and Veterans councils to ensure **Métis Veterans receive the recognition they deserve.**

WOMEN VETERANS

- Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to ensuring the vital role of women in the RCMP, Canadian Armed Forces and the Veteran community is recognized; that women are well supported throughout their careers including their transition to post-service life; and that they have equitable access to VAC's benefits, programs and services.
- October 10, 2025 marks one year since the Government's response to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs report, *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*, released June 12, 2024
- The report includes 42 recommendations to address the needs of Canadian military women and women Veterans regarding their physical and mental health, transition to post-service life, and financial security.
- VAC takes these findings seriously and we have been taking action. To date we have published new and revised Disability Benefit Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines, consulted with women Veterans to develop a Women Veterans Research Plan and launched the Women Veterans Council.
- A CAF-VAC joint working group – Women Wellbeing was formed to provide oversight for recommendations from the ACVA report and aims to meet three times annually.
- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is proud to be an implementation partner of Canada's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
- Being an implementation partner strengthens VAC's relationship with like-minded departments and agencies

like the Department of National Defence (DND)/Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and it also provides VAC with the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the third National Action Plan.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Women Veterans in Canada

- Nearly 1 in 6 Veterans are women (2021 Census) — the fastest-growing Veteran population.
- Women are under-represented in leadership/combat roles and typically earn less due to shorter service.
- More likely to be medically released, face chronic/training-related injuries, and experience mental health issues, including suicidal ideation.
- Post-service, they report lower social support and are ~2% more likely than men to experience episodic homelessness.
- Income decline is common, especially among single parents, caregivers, or those medically released.
- Many hesitate to self-identify as Veterans.
- Most programs were designed for men; inclusive, tailored supports are needed.

Engagement

- VAC engages women Veterans through national forums, roundtables, and consultations to better understand their experiences and inform service delivery.
- These efforts led to the creation of the **Women Veterans Council**, established in December 2024.
- The Council is composed of 12 diverse members and provides direct advice to the Minister on issues impacting women Veterans.

National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

- The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on WPS in 2000, followed by additional resolutions expanding the agenda.
- Canada has launched three National Action Plans on WPS:
 - 2010 (first plan)
 - 2017 (second plan)
 - 2023–2029 (third plan, with one bridging year).

Current Commitments

- CAF: Target of 25% women in the CAF by FY 2026 (1% annual increase).
- RCMP: Ensure 20% of International Police Peacekeeping and Peace Operations (IPP) deployments are women, including in leadership roles.
- Growing deployments of women abroad make it critical VAC services meet their post-service needs.

BACKGROUND

Women Veterans represent the fastest growing segment of Canada's Veteran population, accounting for nearly 1 in 6 Veterans (2021 Census). They face unique challenges across all 7 domains of well-being, including reproductive and sexual health, barriers accessing services, and reluctance to identify as Veterans.

On June 12, 2024, ACVA released its report *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*. The report contains 42 recommendations to address the needs of Canadian military women and women Veterans, particularly in relation to physical and mental health, transition to post-service life and financial security. Women have distinct bodies, experiences and needs, yet military systems were historically designed for men. As a result, many women have experienced harm, injury and illness within a system not built for them and continue to feel invisible and unacknowledged.

The Government tabled its response on October 10, 2024. It agreed with 29 of the recommendations; agreed in principle with 9; took note of 3, and disagreed with 1 (on the advice of DND).

VAC has taken steps to address gaps in data and research. It has formally adopted the Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines and collaborated with McMaster University and It's Not Just 20,000 (INJ20K) to better understand the impact of military sexual trauma. VAC also works with Statistics Canada to strengthen demographic data on women and other equity-deserving groups.

VAC engages women Veterans through national forums, roundtables, and consultations to improve its programs and services. Forums provide space to share lived experience directly with senior leadership. Roundtables, such as those on homelessness and women's health have helped identify systemic barriers and inform policy, program, benefits and services development. Consultations with women Veterans led to the creation of the Women Veterans council.

VAC is also implementing the Government of Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2023–2029), focusing on crisis response, sex and gender-based violence, leadership and capacity, and inclusion. It is developing progress indicators and working with the Women Peace and Security Network Canada (WPSN-C) to understand the grassroots efforts led by women Veterans. As more women are deployed abroad, inclusive, equitable policies and services will be critical to support their post-service needs.

2SLGBTQI+ VETERANS

- The Government of Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada recognize the sacrifices and achievements of all 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, including those affected by the LGBT Purge and systemic discrimination. Guided by Canada’s first Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan, VAC collaborates with Women and Gender Equality Canada, academics, Veteran organizations, and community partners to better support their unique needs.
- 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans face significant challenges – including negative mental health impacts, underemployment, homelessness, harassment, bullying and violence. These challenges are further amplified for people with intersecting lived experiences, including Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ communities, Black and racialized 2SLGBTQI+ communities, and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans with disabilities.
- Veterans Affairs Canada promotes equity for 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, identifying systemic barriers and unique service-related needs by working collaboratively across the Department to shape solutions.
- In 2024-2025, the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund sponsored Egale Canada and Helmets to Hardhats directly supporting the 2SLGBTQI+ community.
- In 2024, the Department hosted the 2024 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum in Fredericton, NB. The 2025 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum will be held in Ottawa on November 26-27.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Findings from the 2023 Veterans' Well-Being Community Health Needs Assessment

- The number of Veterans who are non-binary is similar to that of the general population (0.1% each).
- The number of Veterans who are transgender men and women is the same as that of the Canadian general population (0.1% respectively).
- Only 39.8% of 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans feel a strong sense of community belonging, compared to 59.9% of heterosexual Veterans.

VAC Actions to Support 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans

- **Engagement & Partnerships:**
 - Ongoing engagement with the Rainbow Veterans of Canada and the LGBT Purge Fund Board of Directors.
 - Engagement with the larger community via the 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum and other venues to identify systemic barriers and gaps.
 - Inclusion of 2SLGBTQI+ perspectives in Ministerial Advisory Groups.
 - Represented in commemorative events and pilgrimages.
- **Targeted Funding**
 - Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund (VFWF) supports projects addressing 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans' needs.
 - Allocated funding to support the 2025 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum
- **Inclusive Policies & Training:**
 - Modernizing Sex and Gender Information Practices.
 - Trauma-informed, bias awareness, and 2SLGBTQI+ history training for VAC staff. In the 2025 [Public Service Pride Week](#), VAC hosted screening of *The Fruit Machine* documentary, and hosted a virtual event highlighting the Canadian Museum for Human Rights exhibit, *Love in a Dangerous Time: Canada's LGBT Purge*.
 - Integration of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus), Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA Plus) across programs, benefits, and services policy development/update, as well as decision-making processes.

Improvements to Disability Benefits

- Multi-year modernization of Table of Disabilities (TOD) and Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines (EEGs) (completion 2025–26).

Updates include:

- Expanded guidance on gender-affirming care.
- New EEG for Sexual Dysfunction (2022) with gender-inclusive criteria.
- Enhancements in TOD Chapter 16 - Urinary, Sexual, Reproductive and Breast Impairment (2024)

Commemoration & Recognition

- Expansion of commemorative materials to honour 2SLGBTQI+ military history.
- Public education on the LGBT Purge and past discrimination.

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada supports 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans and their families; a broad community that includes diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The 2SLGBTQI+ community includes those who identify as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex, as well as Veterans who identify as part of sexual and gender-diverse communities and use additional terminology.

Between the 1950s and mid-1990s, 2SLGBTQI+ members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and the federal public service were systematically discriminated against, harassed and often fired as a matter of policy and sanctioned practice, in what came to be known as the “LGBT Purge”. In June 2018, a historic settlement was reached, including a global settlement of \$145 million, including \$110 million for LGBT Purge victims. The LGBT Purge Fund administers a settlement of \$23 million to support reconciliation and memorialization of the LGBT Purge.

Veterans Affairs Canada works collaboratively with the Rainbow Veterans of Canada and the LGBT Purge Fund to identify and address systemic challenges facing 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans.

Veterans Affairs Canada has committed to making space to build community with 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, hosting the landmark 2020 virtual roundtable on 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans and guiding the implementation of Gender Inclusive Services to ensure the representation of transgender and gender-diverse Veterans and their families.

In 2023, Veterans Affairs Canada hosted the Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum, on February 9th and February 16th. The intent of the Forum was to continue to provide an opportunity for Veterans Affairs to elevate the experiences of underrepresented Veterans and encourage conversations and linkages with stakeholder that respond to the needs of women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans. This Women and 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum built on the 2020 Women Veterans Forum, 2020 LGBTQ2 Veterans Roundtable, and 2019 Women Veterans Forum.

In April 2024, Veterans Affairs sent the first ever 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans delegation to France and Belgium to visit historical sites and participate in commemorative events. The delegation was made up of members from Rainbow Veterans of Canada and The LGBT Purge Fund. The delegation also took part in a Battle of Vimy Ridge ceremony on April 9th to honour all First World War 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, particularly Frederick Hardy, whose name is listed on the monument.

In August 2024, VAC partnered with Rainbow Veterans of Canada and the LGBT Purge Fund to host the first annual 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum. The event was held in Fredericton, New Brunswick on August 28-29. The 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans Forum Summary Report was published in January 2025.

WARTIME SERVICE

- The Government is grateful for the dedicated service of all Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans.
- There are no provisions within current legislation that provide authority to designate a period of service as Wartime Service.
- Service in high risk conflicts, operations, and deployments since Korea to present day are designated by the Minister of National Defence as Special Duty Service.
- This classification does not signal lesser respect for the service of modern-era members and Veterans, nor is it indicative of a lesser degree of risk on the part of those deployed.
- Public recognition of serving Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans across all eras and conflicts holds profound significance for Canadian society.
- The Government is dedicated to acknowledging the service of modern-era Veterans.
- By engaging in ongoing consultations, the Department will gather perspectives from Veterans organizations and individual Veterans to ensure their voices are heard in shaping the most effective and meaningful ways to recognize the service and sacrifice of Canada's Veterans.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Service Type – Wartime service and special duty service

- Service during World War I, World War II, and the Korean War are included in the *Pension Act* as service during war.
- Service in other conflicts, operations, and deployments where Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans have been exposed to higher than normal levels of risk are designated by Order of the Minister of National Defence, in consultation with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, as either a “Special Duty Area” or “Special Duty Operation” (commonly called “Special Duty Service”) under the *Veterans Well-being Act*.
- In addition to the Persian Gulf, service in the Balkans and Afghanistan have been classified by Order of the Minister of National Defence as “Special Duty Service”.
- Changing the categorization of those who served in the Persian Gulf from “Special Duty Service” to “Wartime Service” would not result in any change to offered benefits.

Persian Gulf Veterans eligible for Veterans Affairs Canada benefits

- Depending on when they applied for benefits, members and Veterans with service in the Persian Gulf could be eligible under both the *Pension Act* and the *Veterans Well-being Act*.
- Those who applied for benefits on or after April 1, 2006, are eligible under the *Veterans Well-being Act*. Those who applied prior to April 1, 2006, and received a decision, continue to hold some rights under the *Pension Act* related to the condition for which they received that decision.

Government of Canada and Persian Gulf Veterans

- On June 20, 2025, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) released a report entitled, *The Persian Gulf War Was a War*. The report made five recommendations to address the requests from Persian Gulf Veterans for greater recognition of their roles during this conflict, both in terms of commemorating their efforts and of receiving financial compensation.
- The official Government Response to this report must be tabled in Parliament by October 10, 2025.

BACKGROUND

- A petition on this issue was introduced in the House of Commons in June 2023.
 - The Minister of National Defence tabled the response in August 2023 ([Petition e-4399 - Petitions \(ourcommons.ca\)](#)).
- A report on this issue was tabled by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in June 2025, entitled “*The Persian Gulf War Was a War*”, This followed a study by the committee in 2024 during the previous parliament.
 - The Government Response to this report is due by October 10, 2025.

2025-26 DEPARTMENTAL PLAN

- The 2025–26 Departmental Plan (published on June 17, 2025) lays out the Department’s priorities for the year and provides an outline of the important work that we will undertake.
- More than 90% of the \$7.8B in planned spending for 2025–26 will be for payments to Veterans, their families, and other program recipients.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Disability Benefits and Processing Times

- 72% backlog reduction since 2020. Thousands of Veterans now receive decisions faster
- \$164.4M in funding (Nov 2023) allows VAC to retain trained staff until March 2026, sustaining progress
- Streamlined medical consultations and improved decision-maker training to speed up decisions. Expanded use of automation and modernized tools so staff can focus on complex cases

Benefits, Services and Support

- Key priority continues to be reducing processing times with various initiatives such as using digital solutions and streamlining processes to expedite decision-making. While there has been significant progress, more work is underway
- Introducing innovative approaches like social prescribing, which connects clients to a variety of non-clinical community services aimed at improving their health and overall well-being.

Workforce (FTEs)

- Planned FTE reduction in 2026-27 reflects the end of temporary funding, not service cuts
- Temporary funding for Disability Benefits continues until March 2026, Case Management until March 2027, ensuring continued support during transition

Forecasted Spending

- While planned spending appears to decline in 2026-27, updated forecasts show demand continuing to grow
- Future plans will be adjusted to reflect higher need, keeping spending in line with 2025–26 levels. Veterans' benefits remain fully protected and will not be reduced

Canadian Veteran Health Survey (CVHS)

- CVHS launched in 2022 to replace LASS. It now includes all Veterans, not just those released after 1998
- Aligns with Canadian Community Health Survey for better comparisons with the general population. Will be conducted every two years (next cycle in late 2024) giving VAC more timely, representative data to guide policy and services

Commemoration

- The construction of the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan is a priority, with plans to begin building in late spring or early summer 2025

BACKGROUND

The **2025–26 Departmental Plan (DP)** provides parliamentarians and Canadians with a clear view of the results Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) aims to achieve and how resources will be used to deliver for Veterans and their families. It is tabled in Parliament annually and published online to ensure transparency and accountability.

Highlights from the 2025–26 Plan include:

Benefits, Services, and Support

- Cutting disability benefit processing times through staffing, automation, and My VAC Account enhancements.
- Expanding mental health services, including e-therapy and PTSD support, and improving access for women, Indigenous, and underserved Veterans.
- Enhancing financial supports through updates to the Income Replacement Benefit, Veterans Emergency Fund, and VAC systems.
- Supporting rehabilitation, vocational services, and employment through the National Veterans Employment Strategy and enhanced transition services.
- Strengthening community engagement via peer support networks and the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund.
- Expanding efforts to combat Veteran homelessness and improve home accessibility.

Commemoration

- Marking key anniversaries: 80th of the end of WWII, Liberation of the Netherlands, and V-J Day; 25th of the Unknown Soldier's repatriation; 100th of Beaumont-Hamel Memorial.
- Beginning construction of the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan in 2025.

Veterans Ombudsperson

- Streamlining decision-making and complaint resolution for faster, fairer outcomes.
- Expanding outreach through town halls, events, and social media to raise awareness and support.
- Collaborating with VAC to address complaints and promote fairness in service delivery.

Internal Services

- Modernizing technology and tools, including AI testing to improve service and Access to Information processes.
- Advancing sustainability through green procurement and emission-reduction initiatives.
- Supporting a healthy, inclusive workplace and strengthening recruitment with a Veteran-focused strategy.
- Improving communications, stakeholder engagement, and recognition of diverse Veterans.

2023-24 DEPARTMENTAL RESULTS REPORT

- The Departmental Results Report (DRR) outlines what we accomplished and the results achieved for Veteran health and well-being in 2023–24 (tabled in Parliament on December 17, 2024)
- We improved the way we deliver benefits and programs and streamlined our processes while we continued to work on our top priority of reducing processing times for Veterans.
- Our focus continues to be on improving the overall health, well-being and financial security of Veterans and their families, while recognizing and commemorating those who have served.
- More than 90% of the \$6.1B spent in 2023–24 consisted of payments to Veterans, their families, and other program recipients.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- Reduced the backlog of disability benefit applications by 75% since 2020.
- By March 2024, 69% of disability benefit decisions were made within the 16-week target (up from 30% in 2020–21).
- Employed 3,673.3 full-time equivalents, including many new hires, most of whom provided direct service to Veterans and their families.
- Spent over \$690 million in Treatment Benefits to support about 87,000 Veterans for prescription drugs, dental, audio services, vision care, and nursing services.
- Supported housing initiatives for homeless Veterans through the Veterans Homelessness Program, which is delivering \$79.1M in funding to provide rent supplements and other supports.
- Provided over \$1.2 billion to Veterans, survivors, and orphans via the Income Replacement Benefit program to support their financial well-being, rehabilitation and re-establishment to post military life.
- Provided essential financial aid 1,053 times, assisting 842 Veterans and their families with over \$1.6 million to cover basic necessities like shelter, food, and clothing via the Veterans Emergency Fund (VEF) program.
- Funding to support 2,060 Veterans in long-term care which covered care, enhanced programs and services, and helped Veterans with their monthly accommodation and meal costs.
- Spent \$29M in Education Training Benefits (ETB) for over 2,000 Veterans to support new certification, degrees, diplomas, or additional training.
- Supported the preference of participants with 57% of OSI clinic services being provided virtually.
- Hosted quarterly virtual webinars connecting Veterans with employers and attracting between 800-1,000 participants in each session. 3,600 participants attended four webinars with 111 presentations from 80 diverse employers.
- Distributed over 4.4 million commemorative learning products across Canada in the weeks leading up to Veterans' Week.
- Approved funding for 176 initiatives through the Community Partnerships Program, which included 15 new community war memorials, 18 restorations and major additions to existing memorials, and 143 community engagement initiatives.

BACKGROUND

The 2023–24 DRR provides parliamentarians and Canadians with information on what we accomplished and how we achieved the results we wanted to reach during the fiscal year against the plans set out in our 2023–24 Departmental Plan. The DRR is generally tabled and published approximately 18 months after the tabling of the corresponding year’s Departmental Plan.

Highlights from the 2023–24 Report include:

- Made significant progress on streamlining operations and delivering faster, more efficient services to Veterans and their families. Despite a 78% increase in disability benefit applications since 2015–16, with the help of additional temporary staff we reduced the backlog of disability benefits applications by 75% between 2020 and 2024.
- This staffing increase combined with efforts to introduce new, innovative technologies, and expand our outreach have helped us meet the demand and steadily improved the percentage of disability benefit decisions made within the 16-week target.
- Secured additional resources through a \$164.4 million investment to keep up our progress and maintain momentum in reducing the backlog. This funding will extend the contracts of employees who process disability benefits applications until March 2026. It will also extend the positions of case managers and other front-line staff, who assist Veterans and manage caseloads, until March 2027.
- Improved programs for medically released members and their families in partnership with the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. These supports included 24/7 crisis management services, specialized transition programs, and traditional family support.
- Expanded our outreach efforts beyond the mandated visits to Northern communities to include Northern Quebec, Northern Newfoundland & Labrador, and Indigenous communities.
- Supported housing initiatives through the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund (VFWF) that help Veterans find safe and stable housing. We funded 23 projects with a total of \$945,000 focused on this work.
- Led a delegation to the 2023 Invictus Games which were held in Düsseldorf, Germany. Team Canada, with thirty-two members including Veterans and active service members, competed in ten adaptive sports over 8 days.
- Launched an extensive web feature on 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians in uniform which offers an historical perspective on the discrimination and harm faced by members of this community who served in the CAF and also recognizes their important contributions throughout Canada’s military history

2023-24 SERVICE STANDARD RESULTS

- Service standards are part of our commitment to providing quality services to Veterans, former RCMP members, CAF members, and their families.
- Service standards tell Veterans how long they can expect for a service to be provided or for a decision to be made under normal operating circumstances.
- In fiscal year 2023-24, VAC met or exceeded 18 (72%) of its 25 published service standards.
- VAC is aware that current processing times for disability benefits are still unacceptable and reducing them remains a top priority. The Department has made a lot of progress, but there is more work to do.
- VAC is transparent on the progress of reducing processing times for disability benefits applications by publishing these results.
- 2023-24 Service Standards Results were externally published on January 30, 2025.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

- Year-end results for 2023-2024 show that, of the 25 service standards measured, VAC met or exceeded 18 targets, an increase from the 17 targets met during the previous fiscal year.

Disability Benefits:

- Our ability to meet our 16 week service standard is impacted by a number of factors, including an increasing number of applications for disability benefits.
- Between 2015-2016 and 2023-2024, VAC saw a 78% increase in the number of disability benefits applications, which impacted our ability to meet our service standard.
- Since 2019-2020, we've more than doubled our performance for first applications (from 23% to 69% in 2023-2024).

Disability Benefits Processing Times:

- In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Department made significant strides in reducing processing times. Since the spring of 2020 to the end of 2023-2024 fiscal year, we reduced the backlog by 75%.
- For 2023-2024 the average turnaround time for first applications was 20.2 weeks, down from an average turnaround time of 28.1 weeks in 2022-2023 and 39.7 weeks in 2021-2022.
- Between 2015-2016 and 2023-2024, Veterans Affairs Canada saw a 78% increase in the number of disability benefit applications. Despite this increase, we made significant progress in meeting the disability benefits service standard in 2023-2024, with 69% of first applications processed within the standard timeframe (16 weeks).

Additionally:

- VAC hired more employees to process disability benefits applications, who were extended to March 2026 with an [investment of \\$139.6 million](#) announced in February 2022.
- To further improve processing times, the Government announced [additional funding of \\$164.4 million](#) on 3 November 2023. A portion of this funding will help VAC retain temporary trained staff dedicated to processing disability benefits applications for an additional two years, until March 2026. We will continue to strive to achieve our disability benefits service standards.

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada has a set of service standards to measure and communicate the level of service we provide to our clients and the expected timelines relating to our programs and benefits. The results are published both on GC InfoBase - [VAC Service Standards](#) and on VAC's external website [Service standards - Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

A reminder that Service Standards are the external facing commitments that VAC makes to Veterans and the Canadian Public. They are different than the internal facing performance metrics that we use to monitor the performance of our programs.

Part of our ongoing commitment to Veterans and others we serve is to develop and maintain accurate service standards that are based on client feedback, representative of our actual performance, and comply with Treasury Board's Policy on Service and Digital. One of the requirements of this new policy, which took effect on April 1, 2020, is for departments to ensure that services have comprehensive and transparent client-centric standards, related targets, and performance information for all service delivery channels in use. Work is underway in the Department to implement this and other requirements.

The Department routinely reviews its service standards to ensure they are useful to Veterans and other clients. With this, Veteran feedback, and the evolution of Veterans Affairs Canada programs and benefits in mind, we expect a number of service standards will be revised and new ones will be added over time.

Processing Times:

- For 2023-2024, the average turnaround time for first applications was 20.2 weeks, down from an average turnaround time of 28.1 weeks in 2022-2023 and 39.7 weeks in 2021-2022.
- Between 2015–2016 and 2023-2024, VAC experienced a 78% increase in disability benefits applications, which impacted our ability to meet our service standard. However, with the help of additional temporary resources extended until March 2026, we made significant progress: since 2019-2020, we've more than doubled our performance for first-time applications (from 23% to 69% in 2023-2024).
- Applications are fast-tracked for those who are medically at risk (e.g., palliative, advanced age, etc.) or who have an immediate, unmet health need related to their claimed condition.

OFFICE OF THE VETERANS OMBUD REPORTS
(2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT and the 2025 SPOTLIGHT)

- Veterans Affairs Canada appreciates the work and dedication of the Veterans Ombud and her staff.
- We welcome the Ombud's report and recommendations and will work collaboratively with the OVO to continue to improve the support we provide to Veterans and their families.
- We remain committed to reducing processing times for disability benefits and removing inequities faced by Veterans and their families. Veterans Affairs Canada is working to ensure Veterans receive the high-quality care they expect and deserve.
- We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with the Ombud and her office to identify opportunities for improvement.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

2024-2025 Annual Report

- Released on June 17, 2025.
- Summarizes actions the OVO has taken to help individual Veterans and their families with specific issues.
- Presents some of the most common issues concerning the Veteran community and recommends ways VAC can help or address these issues.

In 2024-2025, the OVO received a total of 1848 requests:

- 1569 complaints:
 - 496 OVO cases referred to VAC;
 - 500 cases reviewed;
 - 177 cases outside their jurisdiction; and
 - 396 assessments not initiated.
- 279 requests for information.

The OVO was able to investigate 93% of complaints within 60 days.

2025 Spotlight

- Released on September 4, 2025.
- Outlines the implementation status of recommendations made by the OVO throughout the course of their systemic investigations.

Status of 107 recommendations in the Spotlight as of March 31, 2025:

- 46 recommendations were implemented
- 8 recommendations are partially implemented
- 2 recommendations are in progress
- 2 new recommendations not tracked yet
- 17 recommendations have not been implemented
- 32 recommendations are no longer being tracked (i.e., no longer relevant)

As of March 31, 2025, 75% of the recommendations currently being tracked have been actioned (i.e., fully/partially implemented or in progress).

BACKGROUND

2024-2025 Annual Report

The Office of the Veterans Ombud 2024-2025 Annual Report was released on June 17, 2025. The annual report summarizes the actions OVO has taken to help individual Veterans and their families with specific needs. It also highlights the OVO's efforts to influence change for the larger Veteran community.

Areas of concern include:

- Veterans' lack of access to doctors and the impact this has on claims;
- family doctors and specialists refusing to fill out complex VAC paperwork;
- mental health supports for families;
- survivors receiving incorrect information from VAC, impacting eligible benefits

It also highlights reports and recommendations from the previous year, including the 2024 Spotlight and two new recommendations regarding fairness issues with Additional Dependant Care reimbursement under the Rehabilitation program.

2025 Spotlight

The Spotlight tracks VAC's progress in implementing OVO recommendations dating back to 2007. Each recommendation reflects a concern by the OVO that a piece of legislation, process, or procedure contains a systemic inequity or unfairness.

The 2024-25 Spotlight:

- Acknowledged VAC's progress in addressing gender inequalities related to sexual dysfunction claims as a result of psychiatric conditions.
- Raised concerns that mental health support access for Veterans' families depends on the Veteran engaging in treatment, which is not always feasible.
- Raised concern that the "Relatives" section of the VIP Benefits at Home Policy may unfairly assume a Veteran's live-in relatives will perform household and/or grounds maintenance tasks.
- Related to Pain and Suffering Compensation (PSC), the Spotlight called on VAC to:
 - Resolve a perceived unfairness for single Veterans without dependent children who would have received more money from a one-time Pain and Suffering Compensation payment than from monthly payments, if they had chosen the lump sum option before they passed away. and
 - Until this is resolved, ensure Veterans receive clear information about what happens should they die without having chosen the lump sum payment.

CENSUS DATA ON VETERANS

- The 2021 Census represents the first time since 1971 that a question on military service was included in the Census.
- A Veteran identifier will be included on the long form of Census 2026.
- Census data helps to fill key gaps in our understanding of the Veteran population, such as the number of aging Veterans, the number of Indigenous Veterans, and information on Veteran family composition.
- Veterans Affairs Canada worked with Statistics Canada to develop a Contemporary Portrait of Canadian Veterans to enhance the impact of programs and services, particularly for Veterans who have previously been under-represented.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

What we know so far about Veterans from the Census 2021 data:

- 461,240 Canadian Veterans as of May 11, 2021
- 16.2% of Veterans were women; 83.8% were men.
- Average age of women Veterans was 59.1 vs 61.7 for men.
- 33,420 were age 85 or older.
- 67.0% were married or common-law.
- 22.1% had a university degree or higher.
- Unemployment rate of 8.9%.
- 28.1% reported “always having difficulties” with their activities of daily living.
- 5.4% were in core housing need.
- 23,075 Veterans were Indigenous, including 10,950 First Nations, 10,440 Métis, and 755 Inuk (Inuit), as well as 930 with other/multiple affiliations.
- Indigenous Veterans accounted for 5.2% of Veterans in private households.
- The majority of Indigenous Veterans live off reserve (93.3%) with 6.7% living on reserve.
- The majority of Veterans were cisgender (99.7%) while 0.2% were transgender and 0.1% were non-binary.
- Higher concentrations of Veterans are found in the following cities:
 - Belleville (4.5%), Halifax (4.4%), Kingston (4.0%), Fredericton (3.8%), Saint John (3.5%).

BACKGROUND

The 2021 Census represents the first time since 1971 that a question on military service was included.

Census 2021 Question: Has this person ever served in the Canadian military?

- *Yes, currently serving in the Regular Force or the Primary Reserve Force*
- *Yes, but no longer serving in the Regular Force or the Primary Reserve Force*
- *No*

Compared to the Veteran identifier in Census 2021, the 2026 version provides more detailed information on Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) service type by allowing respondents to specify whether they served – or are currently serving – in the Regular Force, Reserve Force, or “Other” (write-in response). In conjunction with other questions on Census 2026 (e.g., Indigenous status, visible minority status, sex at birth, gender, languages, and more), this differentiation will support comprehensive analyses of the sampled Canadian Veteran population, stratified by all Veteran sub-populations of interest and disaggregated by CAF service type.

The Veteran identifier question in Census 2026 is phrased as follows:

31. Has this person ever served in the Canadian military? Do not include service as a Cadet (youth program).

- *Yes, currently serving in the Canadian military. What type of service is this? Mark all that apply.*
 - *Regular Force*
 - *Reserve Force*
 - *Specify other type of service*
- *Yes, but no longer serving in the Canadian military. What type of service was this? Mark all that apply.*
 - *Regular Force*
 - *Reserve Force*
 - *Specify other type of service*
- *No Canadian military service*

New and updated content on Census 2026 will support comparisons between Regular Force and Reserve Force Veterans across numerous variables of interest, including general health, homelessness, sexual orientation, activities of daily living, and labour force status.

VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA LITIGATION

- Canada's Veterans deserve our greatest recognition and respect for their service.
- Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to ensure that Veterans and their families receive the right benefits and supports when they need them.
- Sometimes Veterans and their families feel that we did not get it right. It is their right to pursue legal actions to resolve their concerns and we respect that process.
- We strongly encourage Veterans and their families to contact us whenever they have questions or need support so that we can work with them to find solutions to whatever issues they are facing.
- Veterans Affairs Canada will continue to take action to strengthen supports available to Veterans and their families

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

VAC Response to Veterans' Legal Actions

- Veterans, like all Canadians, can use all avenues available to them, including legal action, if they feel government programs are not adequate. If a legal action impacts the Government of Canada, the Government is obligated to defend itself against claims that are unfounded in Canadian law.

Settlement vs. Litigation

- Our legislation, regulations and policies are the cornerstones of supports for Veterans and their families. Veterans Affairs Canada has an obligation to provide those supports in a manner that is consistent with the legal authorities Parliament has put in place. While negotiated agreements and outcomes are preferred wherever possible, there are cases where the Government has the obligation to defend itself against unfounded claims.

BACKGROUND

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is currently involved in several legal actions. These include class actions, court actions, judicial reviews and human rights complaints focused specifically on Departmental benefits and services, or where VAC is an interested party.

The Department works closely with the Department of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. The Attorney General of Canada has responsibility for all litigation for or against the Crown, any department, or Crown agent corporations.

As these matters are in front of the court, it would be inappropriate to discuss them in any more detail.

MAIN ESTIMATES – DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET 2025-2026

- Veterans Affairs Canada's Main Estimates reflect this government's continued commitment to Veterans to restore critical access to services and improve the long-term financial security and independence for all Veterans and their families.
- 94% of the Department's budget represents payments to Veterans, their families and other program recipients.
- Veterans Affairs Canada's budget reflects the historic steps we have taken to ensure Canadian Veterans and their families are provided with the support they need.
- The 2025-26 Main Estimates provide VAC funding of \$7.8 billion.
- These contributions for Veterans are an important part of achieving Canada's NATO targets.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Overall Budget Growth

- Increase of \$1.62 billion (26%) over 2024–25 Main Estimates
- 94% of VAC's budget is dedicated to payments for Veterans, their families, and other recipients

Budget Increase Drivers

- Annual demand-driven (quasi-statutory) program adjustments
- Funding for newly signed collective bargaining agreements
- Manuge Class Action Settlement agreement
- Juno Beach Centre, Veterans and Family Well-Being Fund, and Research
- Telemedicine Services
- Advertising initiatives

Support for Veterans

- Majority of funding directed to Veterans' benefits and services
- Programs are demand-driven (quasi-statutory): ensures all eligible Veterans receive entitled benefits
- Budgets are updated annually to reflect expected demand

Managing Increased Demand

- If more Veterans require benefits or services than forecasted, budgets can be increased during the year through Treasury Board submissions

Pain and Suffering Compensation – program with largest increase

- Increase of **\$687 million** in 2025–26, driven by:
 - More Veterans coming forward for support
 - Faster processing and production
 - More Veterans electing to receive lump sum payments

BACKGROUND

The 2025-26 Main Estimates provide Veterans Affairs Canada funding of \$7.83 billion, which represents a net increase of \$1.62 billion (26%) compared to last year's Main Estimates (2024-25).

The 2025-2026 Main Estimates reflect funding adjustments for the following:

- Annual quasi-statutory program adjustments;
- Funding for newly signed collective bargaining agreements;
- Funding for the *Manuge Class Action* Settlement agreement;
- Funding for the Juno Beach Centre, Veterans and Family Well-Being Fund and Research;
- Funding for Telemedicine Services; and
- Funding for Advertising.

The net increase of \$1.62 billion is comprised of the following items:

\$625M increase in Vote 1 (Operating):

- Other Health Purchased Services: \$280M increase due to overall increase in demand and costs for treatment/healthcare.
- *Manuge* SPA (Special Purpose Allotment): \$275M – new funding to meet obligation in the *Manuge Class Action* Final Settlement Agreement.
- Veterans Support Services: \$50M increase due to updated forecast from new rehabilitation contractor.
- Regular operating: \$19M increase due to funding for Collective Bargaining, Service Excellence (Case Management), and *Manuge*, offset by reduction due to the Reduced Government Spending initiative.
- Advertising Initiatives: \$2M received for Advertising funding.

\$985M increase in Vote 5 (Grants and Contributions):

- Increase due to increased demand and/or increased expenditures for the following programs:
 - Pain and Suffering Compensation: \$687M
 - Income Replacement Benefit: \$229M
 - Housekeeping & Grounds Maintenance: \$46M
 - Additional Pain and Suffering Compensation: \$33M

\$7M increase in Statutory budget

- Employee Benefit Plan: Increase due to annual adjustment exercise, *Manuge*, and Collective Bargaining Agreement.

LAPSED FUNDING

- Veterans' benefits and services are demand-driven; so Veterans Affairs' funding model guarantees that funds authorized specifically for these benefits and services are always available to our Veterans, no matter how many Veterans come forward and when.
- Veterans Affairs Canada's top priority is to support Veterans. 94% of the department's budget funds Veterans' programs, benefits and services, this amounted to \$7.3 billion last year alone.
- Between 2015-2016 and 2024-2025, Veterans Affairs Canada experienced a 92% increase in the number of applications received for disability benefits.
- To keep up with the rise in demand and ensure that Veterans get services and benefits when they need them, over \$11 billion has been invested for Veterans since 2016.

QUICK FACTS & FIGURES

Lapsed Funding – 24/25

- This information is not available until the Fall as part of Public Accounts. However, in line with previous years, any reported lapses will be minimal when compared to VAC's spending authority.

Lapsed Funding – 23/24

- Lapsed funding for 2023-24 was \$51M (1% of Total Budget)
 - \$10M - Pension for Life Programs
 - \$2.2M – Disability Pension and Awards Programs
 - \$30M – Normal amounts of unspent funds in 20 Quasi Stat programs
 - \$8M – Operating
 - \$1.4M – Normal amounts of unspent funds in non-Quasi Stat programs and SPAs

Lapsed Funding – 22/23

- Lapsed funding for 2022-23 was \$272M (5% of Total Budget)
 - \$150M - Pension for Life Programs where production did not meet projections
 - \$26M – Disability Pension and Awards Programs
 - \$81M – normal amounts of unspent funds in 20 Quasi Stat programs
 - \$13M – Operating
 - \$2M – Normal amounts of unspent funds in 11 non-Quasi Stat programs

Lapse funding and Demand-Driven Programs

- Money returned to the consolidated revenue fund (lapsed) for quasi-statutory programming is accessible the next year to fund Veterans programming based on demand. This is how “quasi-statutory” program authority works. Veteran programs/services are funded based on need regardless of when the Veterans come forward to receive the benefit.

BACKGROUND

Lapsed Funding 2023-24 is \$51.6M – approximately \$44M (85%) are program funds and the remaining (15%) are operational funds

- 85% of the 2023-24 lapsed or unspent funds are a quasi-statutory expenditure authority approved by Parliament to cover the costs of Veterans benefits and services.
- The Department has no authority to spend these funds for any other purpose thereby safeguarding these funds and ensuring they are available whenever a client comes forward and is deemed eligible.
- The remaining 15% of the 2023-24 unspent funds were approved by Parliament to cover our Departmental operating costs and these unspent funds were made available in fiscal year 2024-25 through standard funding mechanisms available to Departments.
- Therefore 100% of the \$51.6M unspent funds are still available to spend when needed.

Lapsed Funding 2022-23 is \$272M – approximately \$260M (95%) are program funds and the remaining (5%) are operational funds

- 95% of the 2022-23 lapsed or unspent funds are a quasi-statutory expenditure authority approved by Parliament to cover the costs of Veterans benefits and services.
- The Department has no authority to spend these funds for any other purpose thereby safeguarding these funds and ensuring they are available whenever a client comes forward and is deemed eligible.
- The remaining 5% of the 2022-23 unspent funds were approved by Parliament to cover our Departmental operating costs and these unspent funds were made available in fiscal year 2023-24 through standard funding mechanisms available to Departments.
- Therefore 100% of the \$272M unspent funds are still available to spend when needed.