

OFFICE OF THE VETERANS OMBUD 2024 REPORTS

(2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT and the 2024 SPOTLIGHT)

- Veterans Affairs Canada appreciates the work and dedication of the Veterans Ombud and her staff.
- We welcome the Ombud's views and recommendations in her Annual Report and the Spotlight and take them into consideration when establishing priorities to better serve Veterans and their families.
- Veterans Affairs Canada places the highest priority on ensuring Veterans have the services they need.
- We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with the Ombud and her office to identify opportunities for improvement.

WHEN PRESSED:

Ombuds 2024 Spotlight

Q1 – What is the Veterans Ombud’s Spotlight?

Since 2017, the Office of the Veterans Ombud (OVO) has published an Annual Spotlight which tracks progress made by VAC in implementing recommendations made by the OVO throughout the course of their systemic investigations.

Q2 – What are the recommendations for VAC in the 2024 Ombud’s Spotlight?

The OVO notes in particular that VAC has done a good job in reducing the number of disability benefit applications over the service standard, was responsive to their recommendations around the Merlo-Davidson settlement, and has made substantial progress in eliminating gender inequities related to sexual dysfunction claims. However, areas of concern include:

- More transparency in gender-based analyses;
- Mental health support for families;
- Pain and Suffering Compensation (PSC) inequities; and
- Gaps in the Veteran Independence Program (VIP).

Ombuds 2023-24 Annual Report

Q3 – What is the Veterans Ombud Annual Report?

The annual report summarizes actions the OVO has taken to help Veterans and their families and highlights the OVO’s efforts to influence change for the larger Veteran community. The report presents some of the most common issues concerning the Veteran community and recommends ways Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) can help or address these issues.

Q4 – What is the difference between the Veterans Ombud’s Annual Report and the Spotlight?

The Annual Report summarizes actions the OVO has taken to help individual veterans and their families with specific issues. It also presents some of the most common issues concerning the Veteran community and recommends ways VAC can help or address these issues.

The Spotlight outlines the implementation status of recommendations made by the OVO.

Q5 – What concerns were identified in the 2023-2024 Ombud's Annual Report?

The Ombud identified various concerns notably the lack of a family physician or specialist which impacts the Veteran's ability to submit a disability claim or to get a reassessment completed, i.e., the VAC medical questionnaire is seen as a burden by health care providers. When members serve, the family also serves which can cause injury and illness to their mental health for the Veteran's family members. The Veteran's family's mental health needs to be acknowledged, as families do serve together with the Canadian Armed Forces.

Q6 – When were the Ombud's 2024 Spotlight and 2023-2024 Annual Report published?

The Veterans Ombud 2023-2023 Annual Report was released on June 17, 2024. The OVO 2024 Annual Spotlight was released on August 21, 2024.

BACKGROUND — OFFICE OF THE VETERANS OMBUD 2024 REPORTS

(2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT and the 2024 SPOTLIGHT)

2023-2024 Annual Report

The 2023-2024 Annual Report was released on June 17, 2024. The Annual Report summarizes the actions the OVO has taken to help individual Veterans and their families with specific issues. It also presents some of the most common issues concerning the Veteran community and recommends ways VAC can help or address these issues.

In 2023-2024, the OVO received a total of 1776 requests for information and complaints with 1285 being within their jurisdiction. The OVO received 269 requests for information. 636 OVO cases were referred to VAC. The OVO was able to investigate 93% of complaints within 60 days, responded to 62% of information requests within 5 days and making 69% of referrals within 10 days.

2024 Spotlight

The 2024 OVO Spotlight was released on August 21, 2024. The Spotlight outlines the implementation status of recommendations made by the OVO throughout the course of their systemic investigations.

Summary of findings:

- 26 systemic reviews completed with 105 recommendations.
- 2 new recommendations not tracked yet.
- 31 recommendations have been overtaken by events and no longer relevant.
- VAC has implemented or partially implemented 73% (54 of 74 valid recommendations).
- The OVO recognizes that some of their recommendations require consultation or legislative and/or regulatory changes that can take considerable time and effort.

The OVO recognizes notable progress made in three areas:

- Timely Decisions for Disability Benefit Applications.
- Responding to Unfair Outcomes for Women Veterans of the RCMP.
- Gender Equity in the Adjudication of Sexual Dysfunction.

Two outstanding recommendations are of particular concern to the OVO:

- Integration and Transparency of Gender-Based Analysis Plus
- Access to Mental Health Treatment Benefits for Family Members.

Since 2009, VAC has fully or partially implemented the majority of the Ombud's recommendations. We are working to address outstanding items and will continue to

Office of the Veterans Ombud 2024 Reports

Source: Strategic Policy, Planning & Performance Date: 2024/11/22

take the Ombud's recommendations into account as we evolve existing programs and services.

We remain committed to ensuring Veterans have the support they need, when they need it. We have taken action to implement many of these recommendations. For other, more complex recommendations including those that may require legislative changes, we explore these in consultation with the Ombud and Veterans groups.