

## **BURDEN OF CARE: A FAIRNESS GAP IN THE VETERANS INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM POLICY**

- On January 18, 2024 the Veterans Ombud wrote a letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs entitled: *The Burden of Care: A Fairness Gap in the Veterans Independence Program Policy*.
- Veterans Affairs Canada places the highest priority on ensuring Veterans have the services they need, including providing financial assistance for services such as grounds maintenance and housekeeping.
- Since its inception in 1981, one of the guiding principles of the Veterans Independence Program has been to consider the individual needs of the Veteran based on their specific circumstances, including the involvement of relatives living with the Veteran.
- When determining if a Veteran is eligible to receive financial assistance to obtain home care services, Veterans Affairs Canada considers what services are needed and what support can be provided in whole or in part by relatives.
- If the relative(s) are not willing or able to assist in the delivery of home care services, Veterans Affairs Canada is there to support the Veteran.

## **WHEN PRESSED:**

### **Q1 – What is VAC doing to address recommendations made by the Office of the Veterans Ombud (OVO) in their letter: A Fairness Gap in the Veterans Independence Program Policy?**

The Government continues to explore options to best support Veterans and their families, including considering the findings and recommendation from the OVO letter. At this time, there are no planned changes to the regulatory provisions of the Veterans Health Care Regulations regarding Veterans Independence Program (VIP).

### **Q2 – What is VAC's response to concerns that the VIP Benefits at Home Policy creates a gap in benefits for Veterans and their families?**

Veterans Affairs Canada appreciates the work and dedication of the Veterans Ombud and her staff. We thank the OVO for their letter and will continue to work closely with our stakeholders to examine ways we can improve the support we provide to Veterans and their families.

### **Q3 – Are there Veterans who are not receiving support through the VIP program because other relatives live in their home?**

VAC will provide funding for services under VIP to eligible individuals when they are needed. These services are needed when the eligible individual cannot perform the services themselves and no one else living in the household is able and willing to perform them. Even if there are able-bodied residents living in the home that could provide the service, if they are not willing to do so, the eligible individual's need remains unmet and VAC will provide assistance.

### **Q4 – How is the VIP housekeeping/grounds maintenance grant calculated?**

The housekeeping and grounds maintenance grants are calculated based on an individual assessment of each eligible Veteran's level of need and personal situation. Grants are based upon the going rate for these services in their area, up to a maximum allowable amount.

### **Q5 – Is VAC implementing a new benefit to recognize the additional burden and responsibilities borne by all informal caregivers?**

The department offers many programs and services to support Veterans, their family and their caregivers with needs related to their military service.

## **BACKGROUND**

On January 18, 2024 the Veterans Ombud wrote a letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs entitled: *The Burden of Care: A Fairness Gap in the Veterans Independence Program Policy*. The purpose of the letter was to provide their findings and recommendation pursuant to a review of the Department's benefits and programs that support care and independence at home for Veterans, with a focus on the Veterans Independence Program.

The Office of the Veterans Ombud (OVO) finds that the VIP Benefits at Home Policy creates a gap in benefits for Veterans and is unfair to a Veteran's live-in relatives because Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) considers a Veteran's given need to be met if a relative living with the Veteran is able and willing to meet that need.

The OVO recommends that VAC review and revise the existing policy and regulatory frameworks to eliminate gaps that create additional burdens for live-in relatives who are meeting the service related care-at-home needs of Veterans.

Options recommended by the OVO include:

- modifying the VIP Benefits at Home Policy to ensure Veterans are not screened out of VIP benefits when a live-in relative is available, able, and willing to perform supporting tasks; (this issue has been resolved) and
- implementing a benefit to recognize the additional burden and responsibilities borne by all informal caregivers due to a Veteran's service-related condition(s).