

2022-23 AND 2023-24 YEAR-TO-DATE SERVICE STANDARDS RESULTS

- We are committed to providing Veterans and their families with quality service in a timely manner and we monitor this through our service standards.
- Our 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 2022-23, VAC met or exceeded 17 (68%) of its 25 published service standards.
- We know current processing times for disability benefits are still unacceptable and reducing them remains our top priority. We have made a lot of progress, but there is more work to do.
- We are transparent on our progress of reducing processing times for disability benefits applications by publishing these results.
- 2022-23 year-end and 2023-24 Year-to-Date Service Standards Results were externally published on March 25, 2024

WHEN PRESSED:

Q1 – Is VAC meeting its service standards?

Year-end results for 2022-23 show that, of the 24 service standards measured, VAC met or exceeded 17 targets, an increase from the 14 targets met during the previous fiscal year. For example, 96% of Veterans receive a decision on their application for Income Replacement Benefits within 4 weeks of their application and 100% of Veterans have their Veterans Independence Program reimbursement processed within 10 business days of claim receipt by the contractor.

The service standard for disability benefits is for 80 percent of decisions to be made within 16 weeks for First Applications and Reassessments; and 12 weeks for Departmental Reviews. We have also seen an improvement in the time it takes to make decisions for disability benefits applications, and while we have made significant improvement in this area, we are not meeting our service standards and remain committed to doing better. As we work from the oldest applications, we expect to see more improvements as we reduce the number of backlogged applications.

Q2 – Why is VAC not meeting its established service standards for processing disability benefits?

Our ability to meet service standards is impacted by a number of factors, including an increasing number of applications for disability benefits.

Between 2015–2016 and 2022-2023, VAC experienced an increase of 61% in disability benefits applications, which impacted our ability to meet our service standard. However, with the help of additional temporary resources that were extended until March 2024, we have made progress toward improving these service standard results: we've more than doubled our performance for first applications since 2019-2020 (from 23% to 55% in 2022-2023). On November 3, 2023, to ensure the Department continues this momentum, the Government announced additional funding of \$164.4 million. Part of this investment will ensure Veterans Affairs Canada is able to retain existing temporary employees, dedicated to processing disability benefit applications, for an additional two years, beyond March 2024. As we work from the oldest applications, we expect to see more improvements as we reduce the number of files over the service standard.

Q3 – What is VAC doing to reduce processing times and improve service delivery for Veterans?

We know the current processing times for disability benefits are unacceptable. We have made progress, but we know there is more work to do and reducing wait times remains our top priority.

In the fiscal year 2022-2023, the Department made progress in reducing processing times and we expect to see further improvements as we reduce the number of older

files that require processing. Since the spring of 2020, we've reduced the backlog by 77%. As of 30 December 2023, there are 5,054 applications that are exceeding our service standard. For 2022-2023, the average turnaround time for first applications was 28.1 weeks, down from an average turnaround time of 39.7 weeks in 2021-2022 and 48.8 weeks in 2020-2021. The fiscal year-to-date (April to December) average turnaround time for first applications is 20.6 weeks.

VAC has significantly improved the disability benefits service standard result so far in 2023-24. During the first three quarters (61% in quarter one, 71% in quarter two and 73% in quarter three) of the current fiscal year, 68% of Disability Benefits first applications were completed within the service standard compared to 55% in 2022-2023.

Additionally:

- We've hired more employees to process disability benefits applications, who were extended to March 2024 with an [investment of \\$139.6 million](#) announced in February 2022;
- On November 3, 2023, to ensure the Department continues this momentum, the Government announced additional funding of \$164.4 million. Part of this investment will ensure Veterans Affairs Canada is able to retain existing temporary employees, dedicated to processing disability benefit applications, for an additional two years, beyond March 2024
- Approximately 30% of the Department's staff that make disability benefit decisions are either French or bilingual. In addition, the Department hired more bilingual and Francophone decision makers to increase our capacity to process French applications and bring the average processing times for English and French applications closer to parity.
- We added a team dedicated to processing claims from female applicants. This team is working to ensure we can systematically address the current barriers and close the gap in processing times for female and male applicants.
- The Department is modernizing its Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines (EEGs). The improvements to the EEGs will allow for more rapid decisions on the entitlement aspect of a Veteran's application. New EEGs for certain conditions will streamline decision-making.
- We are modernizing the [Table of Disabilities](#) to reflect the most current health evidence and best practices to support Veterans.

A Gender Based Analysis Plus will be applied to the modernization of the EEGs and TOD chapters to ensure that these tools consider the diverse health related experience of Canadian Veterans.

Q4 – Has VAC been able to eliminate the backlog?

The Department is working very hard to address this issue. Between 2015-2016 and 2022-2023, Veterans Affairs Canada experienced a 61% increase in the number of applications received for disability benefits. Since the spring of 2020, we've reduced the backlog by 77%. As of 30 December 2023, there are 5,054 applications that are exceeding our service standard. If we can maintain a low number of applications in the backlog for one full fiscal year, we will likely meet our service standard. Our service standard accounts for the fact that some files are very complex and take longer to process. Therefore, we will always have a small percentage of applications in the backlog.

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BACKGROUND – 2022-23 SERVICE STANDARDS RESULTS

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](#). These are published annually, generally in the third quarter of the next fiscal year, as they include the full previous fiscal year and the first two quarters of the next fiscal year.

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 2022-2023, the average turnaround time for first applications was 28.1 weeks, down from an average turnaround time of 39.7 weeks in 2021-2022 and 48.8 weeks in 2020-2021. The fiscal year-to-date (April to December) average turnaround time for first applications is 20.6 weeks.
- Between 2015–2016 and 2022-2023, VAC experienced an increase of 61% in disability benefits applications, which impacted our ability to meet our service standard. However, with the help of additional temporary resources in 2022-2023, we made progress toward improving these service standard results. Since the spring of 2020, we've reduced the backlog by 77%. As of 30 December 2023, there are 5,054 applications that are exceeding our service standard. As we work from the oldest applications, we expect to see more improvements as we reduce the number of files over the service standard.
- 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.

Policy on Service and Digital:

The *Policy on Service and Digital* came into effect on April 1st, 2020, and outlines the requirement that all services have comprehensive and transparent client-centric Service Standards. To comply with this policy requirement, the Department is currently undertaking a full Service Standards review.

Next steps include:

- Consulting focus groups (to engage discussion on current standards and the potential creation of new access and accuracy service standards.
- This engagement allows the department to better understand what service elements are most important to our Veterans, identifies areas for possible investment in service delivery, and ensures our service standards resonate with those we serve.

Upon completion of the analysis, the Department hopes to refine VAC's Service Standards in fall of 2024.