

Key Messages for New Minister

- It's my honor to be appointed as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.
- As Minister of Veterans Affairs, I am acutely aware of the important role that Veterans Affairs Canada plays in remembering and recognizing the enormous sacrifices made by those who have served in uniform. Canada's Veterans are owed a debt of gratitude that we can never fully repay.
- Words alone cannot possibly match the significance of their service. Our appreciation is best conveyed through our own acts of service towards them, most notably by delivering the support they need, when and where they need it, so their post-service life can be as healthy and fulfilling as possible.
- As Minister, I intend to do everything I can to make sure all of our Veterans are recognized for their service to Canada, represented in our commemorative activities, and well-supported in post-service life
- I am looking forward to being briefed on my new responsibilities in the days and weeks ahead.
- I am looking forward to meeting with Veterans in order to advance on our important mandate of supporting and recognizing Canada's Veterans and their families.

General Messages

- Our Government is committed to supporting Veterans and has shown that through successive Budget commitments of over \$11 Billion since 2016.
- Veterans' needs are varied, and our Department has made improvements to ensure programs and services are meeting the needs of Veterans and their families.
- We are here to work to provide support to all Veterans, when and where they need throughout their lives.

Services

General

- Veterans have given so much to this country and they deserve our greatest recognition and respect for their contributions and sacrifices.
- Since 2016, the Government of Canada has invested more than \$11 billion to provide new and enhanced supports to our Veterans, whether it be for mental health, pensions, or for the military to civilian transition.
- We have made progress to expand benefits and services, and reduced wait times for disability benefit claims.
- Last year, the Government of Canada invested \$164.4 million to retain existing employees for an additional two years and to hire additional case managers and support staff in order to lower the caseload of service delivery employees and reduce the volume of disability applications currently in queue.

Disability Benefit Processing Times (a.k.a. wait times, or backlog)

- Reducing processing times for disability benefit applications continues to be a priority for Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). We have made great progress, but there is still more work to be done.
- Since 2020 we've reduced the number of applications over the service standard by 75%, despite a 78% increase in new applications.
- Since 2021, we have reduced the average processing time for first applications by 59%

National Veterans Employment Strategy

- The Government of Canada is committed to improving employment opportunities for Veterans, promoting their well-being and contributing to their success as they transition to life after service.
- The National Veterans Employment Strategy, announced in June 2024, will strengthen Veteran employment across the country, so every Veteran finds meaningful employment.
- Veterans Affairs Canada will continue working with our colleagues across all government agencies, including the Public Service Commission of Canada, to promote hiring Veterans into the Federal Public Service through the *Public Service Employment Act*.

Commemoration

General

- For more than 150 years, Canadians have served this country in uniform. It's a legacy of service and sacrifice that we should all recognize and remember.
- Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to remember, and to express gratitude and appreciation for Veterans, the fallen and those who continue to serve. From the trenches of Belgium to the mountains of Afghanistan they have represented the very best of us.

Afghanistan Monument

- Work on the detailed development of the selected design continues, which will be followed by the construction of the monument.
- Veterans, family members and friends of those who served, and other visitors will have a fitting place to pay tribute to the commitment and sacrifices of Canadians who took part in our country's whole-of-government mission in Afghanistan to defend peace and freedom.
- The National Memorial to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan will be a permanent place to remember their selfless service to our country.

National Field of Honour

- Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to honouring those who have served Canada and preserving their legacy.
- As noted in the Fall Economic Statement, Veterans Affairs Canada continues to work with the Last Post Fund on a path forward for the National Field of Honour.

CAF Around the World

- More than 2.3 million Canadians have served to defend peace and freedom at home and around the world.
- Each year, Veterans Affairs Canada features key military dates, achievements and sacrifices in one geographic region, reflecting Canada's longstanding role in promoting and defending peace and security across the globe.
- In 2025, the theme will be CAF in the Americas (at home and in the Caribbean).

Invictus Games 2025

- Canada is proud to host the Invictus Games 2025, which will take place 8-16 February 2025 in Vancouver and Whistler, British Columbia.
- The Invictus Games 2025 will inspire Canadians with the incredible stories of the resilience of Canada's service members, Veterans and their families. These stories can help us all better understand, respect and celebrate those who served our country.
- Veterans Affairs Canada is working with partners to ensure that the well-being of Team Canada participants remains a priority.

Equity-deserving Veterans

Indigenous Veterans

- Indigenous peoples continue to proudly serve in uniform today, just as they have throughout Canada's military history. Discriminatory practices, hatred and systemic racism often made it difficult for Indigenous people to enlist and serve to safeguard peace and freedom.
- VAC's Indigenous Veterans Engagement Team (IVET) provides dedicated guidance and information on how to best meet the needs of, and engage with, Indigenous Veterans through training, access to information and resources.
- VAC conducts at least 12 visits per year to reach to Veterans and their families living in northern communities, and participates in engagements across the country.
- In 2023, VAC signed a Letter of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations which highlights the joint priorities of Veteran engagement, outreach, and commemoration.

Women Veterans

- Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to ensuring that women Veterans have equitable access to programs and services available, including by integrating a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) into all programs and policies.
- We are collaborating with women, stakeholders, subject matter experts and other government departments to help identify and address systemic issues specific to sex, gender identity, gender expression within the women Veterans community.
- The creation of the new Women Veterans Council, built by women for women, will provide recommendations to the Minister on how the Government of Canada can better support women Veterans.