



Veterans Affairs  
Canada

Deputy Minister

P.O. Box 7700  
Charlottetown, P.E.I.  
C1A 8M9

Anciens Combattants  
Canada

Sous-ministre

C.P. 7700  
Charlottetown (Î.-P.-É.)  
C1A 8M9

The Honourable Élisabeth Brière  
Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister responsible for the Canada Revenue  
Agency  
66 Slater Street  
Ottawa, ON

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the entire Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) team, from headquarters in Charlottetown and our service locations across Canada, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister responsible for the Canada Revenue Agency. As your Deputy Minister, I look forward to working with you to advance our important mandate of supporting Canada's Veterans and their families and recognizing their service to our country.

Driven by the needs of Veterans, the Department's annual budget has grown steadily in recent years to \$7.7 billion in 2024-2025, with over 90 percent going directly to Veterans and their families or survivors. Significant new investments of over \$11.5B have been made since 2016. Much of these investments are now being counted as part of Canada's commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (or NATO) 2% annual GDP defence target, and represent approximately 9% of that target.

**Our main focus is delivering service and improving support programs we provide to Canadian Veterans and their families.** Specifically, improving the processing time for disability benefits remains our top priority and the most significant issue traditionally identified by the Veteran community. Temporary investments through recent budgets have allowed us to successfully reduce the backlog of disability benefit applications by over 69% since spring 2020. This has been achieved against demand that has been increasing by 10% each year. We continue to seek additional, permanent investments to resolve the backlog, provide future stability in processing, and develop automation and AI tools that will allow us to further modernize and streamline our processes.

As of March 7, 2025, there were 7,796 applications over the 16 week service standard (backlog). This represents a significant decrease from September 2019 when 23,260 applications sat beyond the service standard. We also have successfully bridged significant gaps that existed for applications from women

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and Francophone Veterans, and now there are virtually no gaps in these categories. We recognize that there is still more to be done.

**We also provide direct support to Veterans under case management and have built significant expertise in this domain.** Over 40,000 Canadians served in uniform in Afghanistan, and greater than 25% of those have a confirmed PTSD diagnosis. At present, 15,330 Veterans are receiving direct case management from 482 professional case managers at VAC, and a further 1,629 Veterans are under guided support as they transition from rehabilitation.

**Supporting the good mental health of our Veterans is important.** In 2022 the Department put in place a new mental health benefit to support all Veterans struggling with mental health. Since its implementation on April 1, 2022, this benefit has supported 24,102 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veterans so that they are able to get immediate access to care.

**Engagement with the Veteran community and working with them on priority issues continues to be paramount.** Veterans are represented by a number of organizations and voices and we work directly with all of them. Currently, there are Ministerial Advisory Groups in the areas of Families, Recognition, Policy, Care and Support, Service Excellence and Transition as well as Health and Well-being that provide opportunity to assemble views and help develop strategies on priority issues. You will have opportunity to meet with these groups as an early engagement. We have equally developed significant efforts with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leadership to co-develop initiatives that ensure recognition of Indigenous service and sacrifice. Additionally, and importantly, December saw the announcement of the new Women Veterans Council to help coalesce needed work related to women who have served (as well as those currently serving). Twelve accomplished women were named to the inaugural Council, which held its first formal meeting on January 29<sup>th</sup> in Ottawa and, on March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, the Department hosted *Honouring Her Service: The 2025 Women Veteran's Forum* in Ottawa.

**Commemoration is another critical aspect of our work.** A number of signature events are planned over the next few months.

From May 4 to May 8 2025, we will mark the **80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe** with a series of events which will carry national and international attention. The programming both in Canada and abroad are opportunities to pay tribute to and honour the service and sacrifices of Canada's fallen and all Veterans who served during the Second World War. It is also an opportunity to connect with modern-day Veterans, notably women and Indigenous Veterans, still-serving CAF members and their families and share their stories and Canada's rich military history. From May 1-7, an official Government of Canada delegation, which will include approximately 20 Veterans of the Second World War, will travel to the Netherlands to participate in multiple ceremonies marking this pivotal moment in history. The domestic delegation will



take place in Toronto, with a signature national ceremony to commemorate the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day on May 8. Detailed briefings on these events will be provided as soon as possible to provide further details on your opportunities to participate in these important events.

The Department has a number of other key priorities, including new initiatives to address Veteran homelessness (with our colleagues at Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada) and to advance post-service opportunities through the National Veterans Employment Strategy. We also have made significant strides in advancing on our commitment to diversity and inclusion through more active identification and addressing issues of consequence to under-represented Veteran groups (Women Veterans, Indigenous Veterans, 2SLGBTQI+ Veterans, Black and other racialized Veterans).

We continue to focus on outstanding and ongoing commitments to ensure meaningful supports and recognition are in place for Canada's Veterans and their families. Our steadfast emphasis on service excellence, modern delivery of supports, diverse commemorative and recognition initiatives and strong connection to the Veterans community are at the core of VAC's current work.

Along with a talented and committed group of senior executives, and with a dedicated and professional staff in 70 locations across Canada, I look forward to working with and supporting you as we promote the well-being of Canadian Veterans and their families while paying tribute to the significant role they and those who served before them have played for our country.

Sincerely,



Paul Ledwell  
Deputy Minister