



Veterans Affairs
Canada

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13 May 2025

The Honourable Jill McKnight
Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence
66 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON

Dear Minister McKnight,

On behalf of the entire Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) team, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence and welcome you to the Department. As your Deputy Minister I, along with the senior leadership team, look forward to supporting you in our important mandate of supporting Canada's Veterans and recognizing their service to our country.

VAC serves a highly diverse group of Veteran clients, reflecting the remarkable breadth of Canada's contributions to world peace. According to Census 2021, there are over 461,000 Veterans in Canada. As of December 2024, there were 183,070 VAC clients. This number includes Veterans and still serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces (123,767), families and caregivers (37,170), and serving and retired members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (22,133). Veterans range broadly in age, with the average Veteran aged 62 and a current average age of release being 35. The Department is committed to serving all Veterans in a timely and compassionate manner, in locations across Canada.

In line with the new government's direction, I would like to share an overview of the work underway at VAC in these key priority areas.

Modernize and streamline the benefits system

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 75% since spring

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2020. This has been achieved against demand that has been increasing by 10% each year. *redacted*

Make it easier for Veterans to get jobs

In June 2024, VAC launched the National Veterans Employment Strategy (NVES), a strategy that encompasses military skills transition, creating and recognizing Veteran-ready employers, and positioning the public service as a leader in Veteran employment. We are working closely with certifying bodies, regulators, and government partners to better validate military-acquired skills so that Veterans can better connect to employment. The NVES will be a significant focus to provide additional supports and coordination that benefit Veterans and contribute to Canada's skills-based economy.

Improve health services and support for women Veterans' health

VAC recognizes that women Veterans have been historically underrepresented in research, which has contributed to disparities in health and well-being outcomes. VAC recently established a new Women Veterans Council to focus work related to women who have served (as well as those currently serving). *redacted* This research is key to help VAC build the evidence base required to inform policies and programs that better understand and respond to the needs of women and other equity-deserving Veterans. Further, VAC has engaged in a multi-year initiative to modernize our Table of Disabilities and Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines to better reflect the needs of women Veterans. These changes reflect current health research and have applied a Gender-Based Analysis Plus mindset throughout.

Expand culturally relevant services for Indigenous Veterans

VAC recognizes the need for improvement in the delivery of service to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Veterans and has been working hard to improve these relationships. Since 2017, VAC has conducted regular outreach visits to northern and remote Indigenous communities to connect Veterans with our services. We have partnered with Indigenous Services Canada to further expand our delivery of services and to increase awareness of culturally safe supports for Indigenous Veterans. We've established an Indigenous Veterans Engagement Team to advise on culturally appropriate engagement and program design (including culturally appropriate healing practices) and in January of this year, the Minister signed a letter of understanding with the Assembly of First Nations' National

Veteran Council to ensure our continued collaboration. Our work continues in partnership with all Indigenous communities to identify areas where VAC's benefits and services can be improved.

Expand recognition of service

VAC's commemorative programming aims to increase Canadians' awareness and understanding of the contributions and sacrifices made by those in uniform and to ensure that all Veterans and their family members feel recognized. In December 2024, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) published a report entitled "The Person Gulf was a War". The report made several recommendations to enhance the recognition and classification of certain conflicts (e.g. Persian Gulf, Afghanistan) and in order to ensure that post-Korean Veterans are recognized and that our programming resonates with them, VAC will be engaging with stakeholders and partners on how we can better recognize the service of modern-day Veterans.

Preserve the National Field of Honour

Commemorating the sacrifices and achievements made by Veterans is a key component of VAC's mandate. Along with commemorative events marking the 80th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the construction of National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan, the National Field of Honour (NFOH) located in Point-Claire, Quebec to the Government of Canada is a key commemorative priority.

In addition to the NFOH proposal, your consideration will be required regarding the national memorial to Canada's mission in Afghanistan in the coming weeks in support of the planned unveiling in 2027.

VAC is proud of the work we do to support Veterans and their families. Our Veterans and their incredible sacrifices are a point of pride for all Canadians with Veterans contributing to our national sense of unity and serve as a rallying point in Canadian sovereignty.

You will have the opportunity to meet with various Veterans and Veteran advocacy groups in the coming weeks, each of whom will share their passion in progressing Veterans programming in Canada. I look forward to supporting you in your mandate and to our work together on behalf of Canada's Veterans.

Sincerely,

Paul Ledwell
Deputy Minister