

# Disability Benefits Processing Times

## Issue

Between 2015-2016 and 2023-2024, Veterans Affairs Canada experienced a 78% increase in the number of applications received for disability benefits. One of our priorities is reducing disability benefits processing times for Veterans and their families. Our service standard target for disability benefits is for 80 percent of decisions to be made within: 16 weeks for First Applications and Reassessments (review as to whether the condition has worsened); and 12 weeks for Departmental Reviews (review to confirm or change an original decision). 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.

## Context

On November 3, 2023, to ensure the Department continues the momentum gained in reducing processing times, the Government announced additional funding of \$164.4 million. Part of this investment will ensure Veterans Affairs Canada is able to retain existing trained temporary employees, dedicated to processing disability benefit applications, for an additional two years until March 2026.

## Key Data and Milestones

Veterans Affairs Canada has reduced the backlog (i.e., applications over the service standard) of disability benefit applications by 69% since the Spring of 2020 from 22,138 to 6,824 as of December 31, 2024.

For the first three quarters of the 2024-2025 fiscal year (April to December), the average turnaround time for first applications was 20.2 weeks, which is consistent with the 2023-2024 result. These results show a significant improvement compared to previous results where the average turnaround times were 28.1 weeks in 2022-2023, 39.7 weeks in 2021-2022, and 48.8 weeks in 2020-2021.

In the first three quarters of the 2024-2025 fiscal year (April to December), we met the service standard for first applications 51% of the time. This is a decline from 2023-2024 results where we met the service standard for first applications 69% of the time. Despite the decline in the service standard results, in the first three quarters of 2024-2025, the number of applications completed has increased by 5% when compared to the same period last fiscal year (42,200 to 44,500). A contributing factor for the decline in the service standard is an increase in the volume of applications received this fiscal year (average intake is 7,000 applications per month for the first three quarters this fiscal year compared to 6,700 per month in 2023-2024). In addition, the Department has lost some trained decision-makers. Both the loss of staff and the increase in

demand this fiscal year has impacted the recent improvements in processing times and reductions to the backlog.

Intake of applications continues to rise. For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the average intake was 6,700 applications per month (80,000 for the year and 73,000 for 2022-2023). For the first three quarters of the 2024-2025 fiscal year (April to December), the average intake was 7,000 applications per month.

We have made great progress recently, but there is still more work to be done.