



Veterans Review and
Appeal Board Canada

Tribunal des anciens combattants
(révision et appel) Canada

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2028



FROM THE CHAIR

I am very pleased to present the Strategic Plan for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board for 2023-2028.

This plan is dedicated to the people we are honoured to serve: Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP members, and their families. It is anchored in our legislated mandate, which is to provide an independent appeal process for Veterans who are not satisfied with disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. This plan is guided by our vision and mission to ensure Veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to, through fair and timely hearings and decisions. Finally, it sets out the priorities and activities that will help our Board members and staff work together to fulfill our commitment to Veterans and their families.

Since 1995, we have been providing Veterans with the opportunity to share their story with us during their hearings to learn more about how their disability is related to their service and how it affects their lives. The Board awards benefits to thousands of Veterans each year based on new information and evidence presented at their hearing during this testimony.

Over the years, the way we work has changed considerably, but our mandate to serve Veterans has remained constant. This strategic plan renews our deep commitment to service delivery and highlights our continuing efforts to modernize our program and streamline our processes to better serve Veterans. This plan also calls attention to our evolving workload, and what we are doing to invest in our people to meet the future needs of Veterans and their families.

I am proud of this plan and the future path of service that it lays out. I hope you will take time to read through and learn more.

Christopher J. McNeil
Chair



Photo: Official Opening of St. Peters Road location

What We Do

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB, the Board) is an independent tribunal providing an avenue for Veterans to appeal disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). The Board provides a fair and independent appeal process for Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members, and their families.

The Board ensures that Veterans receive their legal entitlements for disabilities related to service. To do this, we offer two levels of Appeal for disability benefits decisions: a review hearing; and, if the Veteran remains dissatisfied, a subsequent appeal hearing.

[Our Mandate](#)

[Our Vision, Mission and Values](#)

Strategic Plan

This plan lays out our organization’s strategy to guide our service to Veterans and their families through our goals and objectives for the coming years. We learned many valuable lessons as we worked through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout changes in the workplace, modifications to disability benefits programs and evolving technologies, our core responsibility of providing appeals to Veterans who are not satisfied with their disability benefits decisions has remained the same. We continue to adapt to the ever-changing work environment as we work to reduce the burden faced by many Veterans and their families. This plan is not an exhaustive list of all our objectives and actions for the next five years, but is a framework to guide us in providing the highest level of service to Veterans.

Our Work Environment



Photo: VRAB Office, St. Peters Road

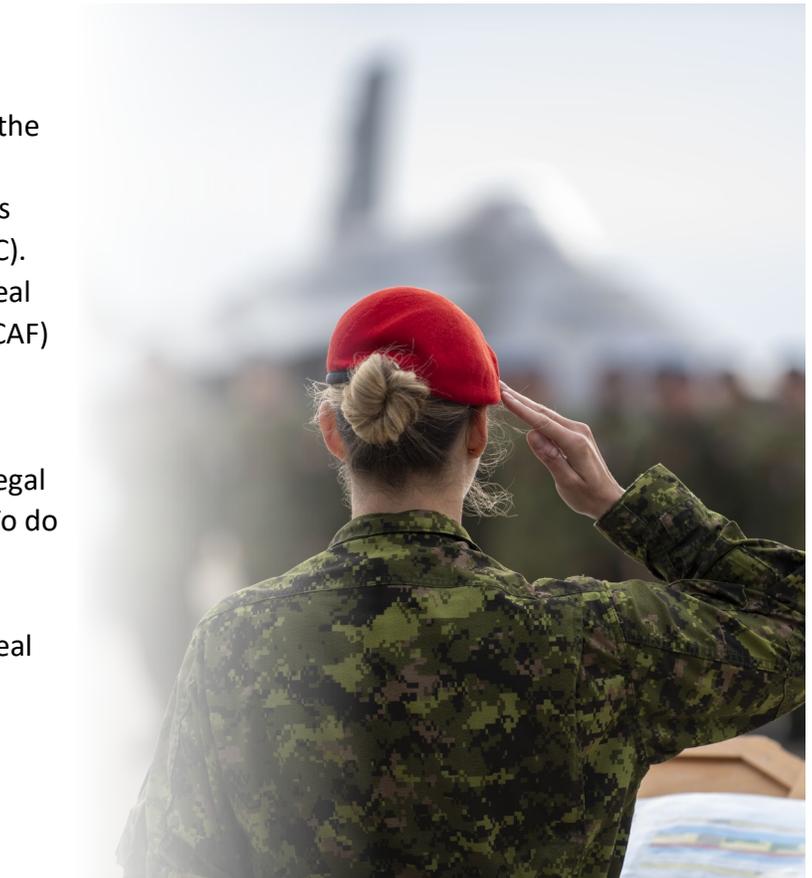


Photo: Corporal Eric Chaput, Canadian Armed Forces photo

The Board’s program is delivered by staff from our head office in Charlottetown, and by Board Members across the country. Our workload is primarily correlated with the workload of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA). BPA’s caseload flows from VAC’s volume of decisions issued, which has increased greatly in recent years due to increased funding and initiatives to reduce the backlog. We have reorganized our structure and workflow and taken on several initiatives to address the growing number of incoming cases. The Board aims to reduce its pending cases through its objectives within this plan and deliver consistently timely decisions to Veterans who appeal their VAC decisions.

Priorities, Goals & Objectives

The Board's goals and objectives aim to improve the Board's performance in accomplishing its core responsibility, our appeal program. These objectives are designed to best position the Board to provide high quality hearings and decisions to Veterans, and do so in a timely manner.

Priority: Access to Justice

How can we improve timelines and the process for Veterans seeking to appeal their disability benefits decisions?

Access to justice is a key component of the Board's mandate. It is imperative that justice be accessible to all in a timely manner. The number of decisions issued by VAC is projected to continue to grow, meaning the need for reviews and appeals will continue to rise as well. These goals and objectives will guide us as we enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of our tribunal services:



Goal 1. Reduce timelines for all claims registered with the Board

Objectives:

- Hear and deliberate cases more effectively
- Deliver decisions faster through improved workload management
- Maximize use of available and emerging technologies and innovations

Goal 2. Improve communication to Veterans and their families

Objectives:

- Use social media and other digital platforms to improve communication and outreach to the public, Veterans and stakeholders
- Expand stakeholder outreach and participation at events
- Hold information sessions with community partners
- Establish a baseline for awareness of the Board's program
- Improve visual content on the Board's website



Photo: RCMP Twitter Account

How we will measure success:

- **Service standards:** The Board will meet its service standards consistently
- **Reduced wait times:** Wait times for Veterans seeking an Appeal are reduced
- **Increased awareness:** Awareness of the Board's program is increased and Veterans reach out sooner

Priority: Productivity

How do we empower our people to create a culture of high-performance?

To achieve our mandate and serve Veterans and their families, we focus on ensuring high-quality and effective delivery of our hearings. This approach, balanced with fostering a workplace that cares about its employees and Members, is key to maintaining high performance and a positive culture in our organization:



Goal 1. Create a Workplace of Choice

Objectives:

- Use Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) results to create targets for employee satisfaction
- Maximize the benefits of hybrid work

Goal 2. Improve decision-making quality

Objectives:

- Provide ongoing training for Board Members to assist in maintaining consistent application of legislation in decision-making
- Adopt new approaches to decision processing
- Standardize procedures and guidelines to improve decision-making
- Conduct regular evaluations of decision-making processes and outcomes
- Increase plain and inclusive language in decisions and letters
- Ensure that the decisions we provide meet the needs of Veterans and their families.
- Establish informal resolution processes such as early intervention to support a simple, quick and fair appeal process

Goal 3. Train and develop staff

Objectives:

- Expand position-specific training
- Standardize employee performance indicators and provide continual feedback to support learning and development
- Continue to support staff developmental opportunities internally

Goal 4. Recruit skillsets and language competencies

Objectives:

- Recruit and retain more bilingual personnel
- Provide leadership development opportunities and training
- Hire staff with key experience and skillsets to strengthen the depth of our organization

How we will measure success:

- **New methodologies:** New methods are successfully implemented to reduce Veteran wait times
- **Improved decision-making:** Quality decisions are made effectively, with consistent application of legislation and communicated clearly to Veterans
- **Employee satisfaction:** PSES and internal survey results indicate staff are happy at work and are successful in their roles
- **Staff Development:** Staff are well trained to process all cases effectively, in both official languages

Priority: Innovation

How do we build an organization that evolves and adapts in a constantly changing environment?

Maintaining a culture of innovation and continuous improvement allows us to best serve Veterans and their families. We will ensure this culture is maintained and improved upon in the coming years.



Goal 1. Leverage new technologies

Objectives:

- Develop VRAB portal within the Client Service Application
- Replace features of the VRAB Scheduling Application that can be made more effective
- Adopt the Service Health Records Search tool

Goal 2. Promote innovative thinking

Objectives:

- Encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration among staff and stakeholders
- Support employee-led initiatives for process improvement
- Use Veteran and stakeholder feedback to inform improvements

Goal 3. Ensure ongoing resources and structure

Objectives:

- Further develop training standards, development and delivery and performance management and assessment
- Ensure resources meet evolving requirements
- Assess service delivery regularly to ensure resources are available to enhance operational processes

How we will measure success:

- **Improved systems:** New tools are developed and implemented to increase the efficiency of all decision making and scheduling
- **Veteran backed improvements:** Regular practices to act on Veteran feedback from exit surveys and other feedback mechanisms are carried out
- **Assess and deliver:** Service performance is regularly taken into account and changes are made to improve the Veteran experience with the Board



Photo: S1 Taylor Congdon, Canadian Armed Forces photo

Priority: People

How do we build a culture that is inclusive of all and empowers our people to support all Veterans?

Fostering a healthy and safe organization that considers diversity and inclusion is a key priority at the Board. An environment where all staff and clients feel healthy and safe is paramount to a successful organization. We will provide diversity and inclusion support to our staff and Members and create a sense of team. The following objectives aim to support our goals:



Goal 1. Create a more Veteran-centric approach

Objectives:

- Ensure staff understand our mandate and values
- Encourage staff to attend hearings to hear the stories of those we serve
- Support the well-being of Veterans through care, compassion and respect

Goal 2. Boost inclusivity, diversity and equity at the Board

Objectives:

- Embrace GBA plus practices and our Accessibility Action Plan and ensure there are resources to effectively support this work
- Enhance knowledge on our diverse staff and clients
- Attract and retain members of employment equity groups
- Create an inclusive workplace through leadership behaviours and practices



Photo: ANAVETS Convention, 2018

How we will measure success:

- **Positive feedback:** The Board receives more positive client feedback confirming we are providing good services to Veterans
- **Diversity:** Our work environment is diverse and dynamic, with increased numbers of staff in employment equity positions
- **Knowledge:** Staff complete training and are knowledgeable about the Board's various commitments on accessibility, GBA plus and more
- **Delivery:** The Board meets all of its commitments with respect to diversity and inclusion

What's Next

Thank you for taking time to read the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's 2023-28 Strategic Plan. This document will be the foundation for planning and accountability at the Board for the coming years. The priorities outlined in the plan will be used to drive change and improvement, while sharpening our focus on how we can best serve Canada's Veterans and their families.

The Board reports annually on its activities in its Departmental Plan and Departmental Results Report and the progress on our goals and objectives will be available in these reports. This plan will also be reviewed annually to measure progress and make necessary refinements. The Board will target efforts within our four strategic priorities and work towards the objectives described in this document.

It is an honour for us to continuously improve our Appeal program in order to ensure Veterans and their families are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.



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