



Veterans Review and
Appeal Board Canada

Tribunal des anciens combattants
(révision et appel) Canada

Annual Report

2023-2024



Veterans Review and Appeal Board

2023-2024 Annual Report

Chairperson's Message

I am pleased to present the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (the Board, VRAB). This document showcases our commitment to serving Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members.

In October 2023, the Board published its [2023-2028 Strategic Plan](#) which identified four key priority areas that will help guide our service to Veterans and their families, in the coming years:

- Access to Justice
- Productivity
- Innovation
- People

In 2023-2024, we received 6,727 applications, an increase of 10% compared to the 6,141 applications received in 2022-23. To manage the growing workload and meet the needs of Veterans we hired additional staff as a result of funding received in 2023.

We also continued efforts to adjust the way we work to improve productivity, enhance the quality and consistency in decision-making, and streamline our processes to better meet the evolving needs of Veterans and their families.

In partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA), there have been a

number of initiatives implemented to improve efficiency by sorting and adjudicating claims through various streams. One example is the new Early Resolution Process that we launched in 2023-2024, which helps to resolve simple/single issue claims in an informal and streamlined process. The claims that are best suited for this process typically require minimal evidence from the BPA advocate to support the claim and meet a defined criteria.

These initiatives contributed to a 72% increase in the number of hearings held for Veterans over the past few years (4,640 in 2023-2024, compared to 2,704 in 2020-21).

Throughout the past year, we have continued to uphold our mandate of providing fair and impartial hearings for Veterans and their families. In 2023-2024, we heard a total of 4,640 cases. Of those, 3,846 were reviews, 508 were appeals, and 286 were reconsiderations.

As a result of hearings during the 2023-2024 fiscal year, 87% of the Veterans who had cases heard received additional benefits for their service-related disabilities.

I invite you to review this Annual Report, which not only highlights our achievements over the past year but also reaffirms our dedication to ensuring every Veteran receives the benefits they are entitled to for service-related injuries.

Christopher J. McNeil
Chairperson

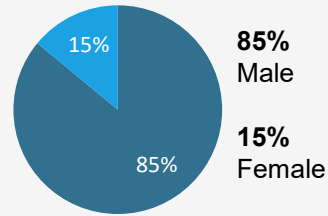
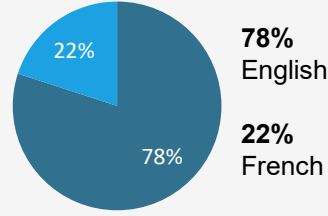
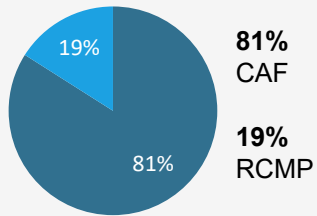


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Client demographics for 2023-2024

The following provides further information on the demographics of the clients who applied to the Board in 2023-2024.

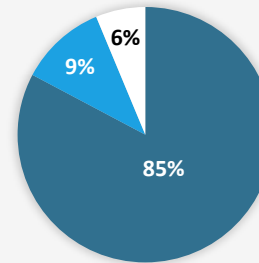
5,825
Total clients



Number of applications for 2023-2024

In 2023-2024, the volume of applications received by the Board **increased by 10% from 2022-23.**

6,727
Total applications



85%
5,741 Review
increase of 13% from 2022-23

9%
603 Appeals
decrease of 9% from 2022-23

6%
383 Reconsideration
decrease of 1% from 2022-23

Review hearings are the first level of redress

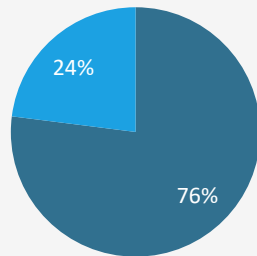
Appeal hearings are the second level of redress

Veterans who are not satisfied with an Appeal decision can apply to the Board for a Reconsideration if certain conditions exist

Nature of applications for 2023-2024

In general, the Board receives two kinds of applications:

- those for entitlement to benefits based on the relationship between the disability claim condition and service; and
- those related to the level of assessment based on the extent or severity of the disability.

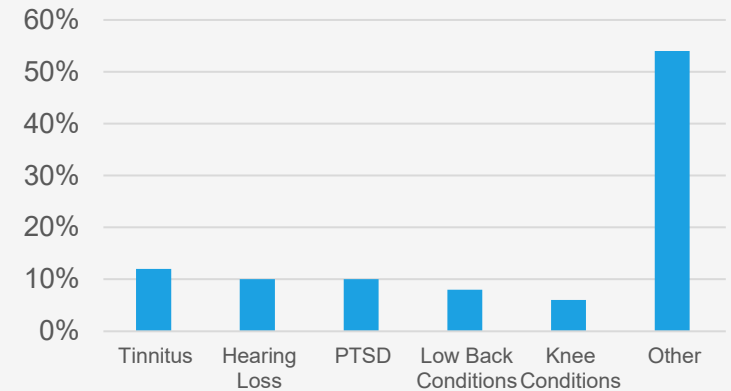


76%
Entitlement cases

24%
Assessment cases

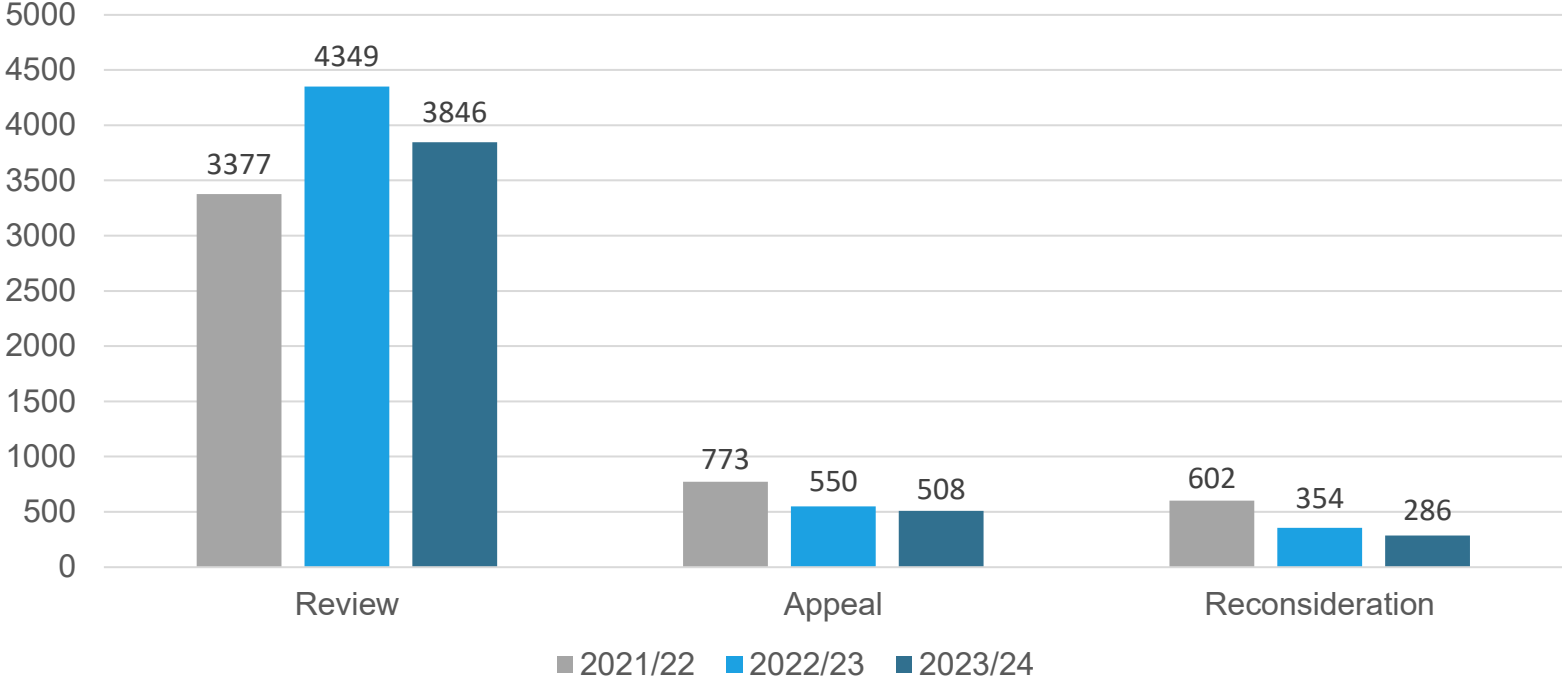
Top conditions for 2023-2024

- Tinnitus (12%)
- Hearing Loss (10%)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (10%)
- Low Back Conditions (8%)
- Knee Conditions (6%)
- Other (54%) – Examples include neck conditions, anxiety/depressive disorders, etc.



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Breakdown of VRAB Hearings



Did you know?

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is an independent organization operating at arm’s length from Veterans Affairs Canada to ensure all applicants have access to a fair review or appeal process.

Applicants may bring forward new information, and present evidence in support of their application for disability benefits. The Board’s appeal process is non-adversarial, which means that no one is arguing against the Veteran.

As independent decision-makers, Board Members are not bound by previous decisions. They consider every matter before them with a fresh perspective.

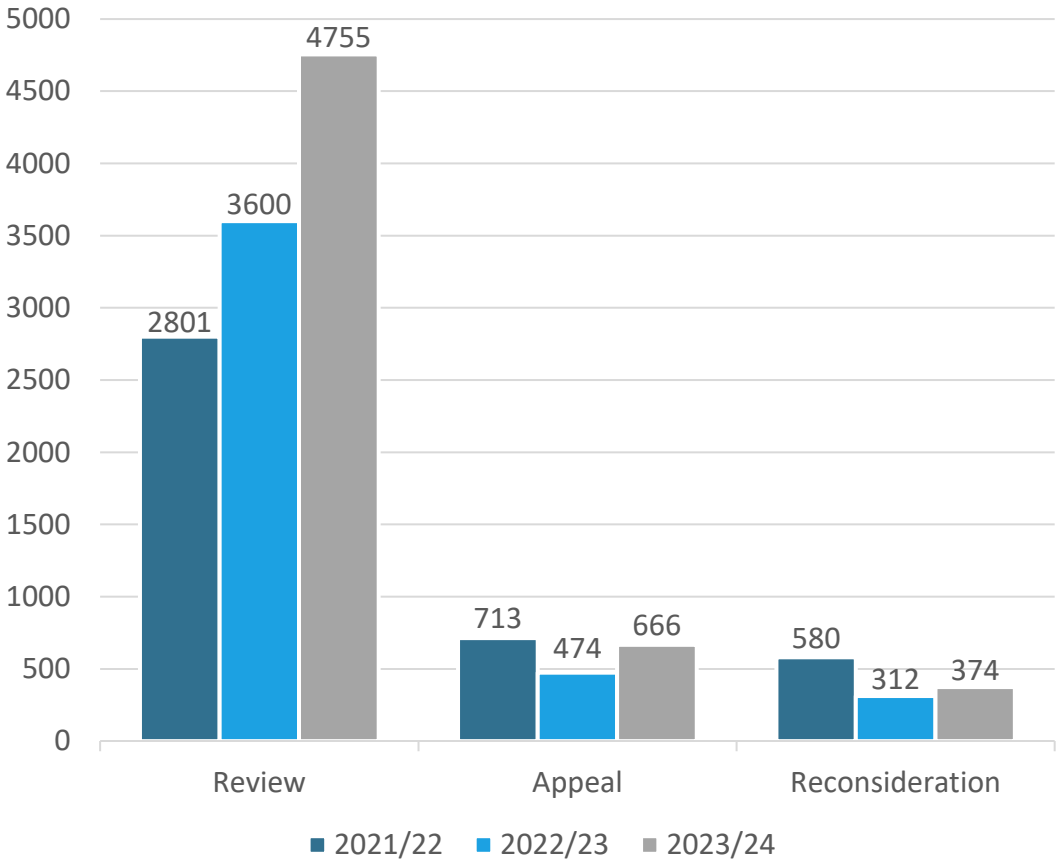
Review: A Review Hearing is the Board’s first level of redress, an opportunity for Veterans to appear before decision-makers (Board Members) and tell their story.

Appeal: An Appeal Hearing is the Board’s second and final level of redress. Their case will be heard by three Board Members who were not involved in their Review Hearing.

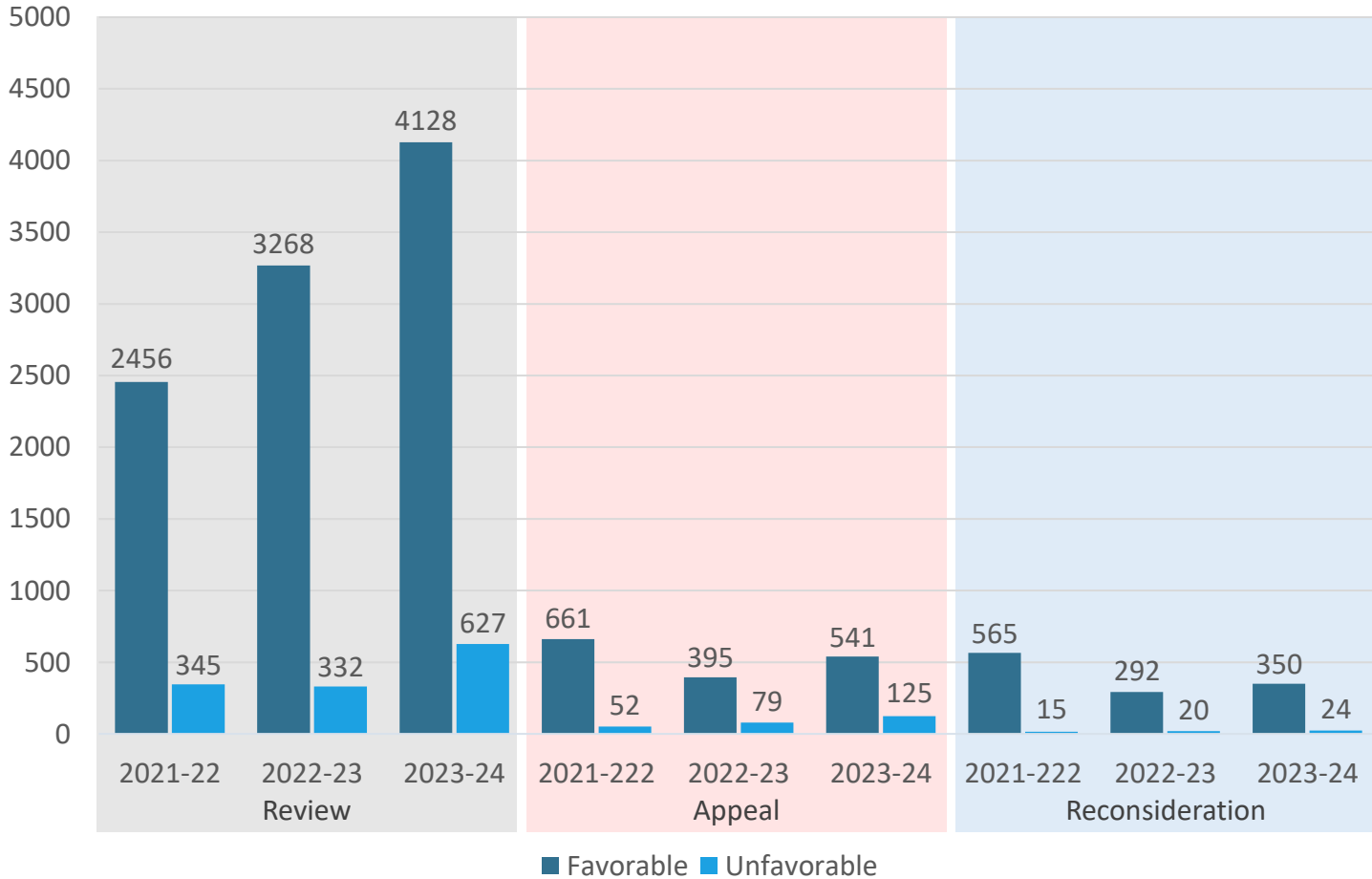
Reconsideration: If a client is still dissatisfied with an appeal decision, they can apply to the Board for a reconsideration (a re-opening of their case) if new, credible, and relevant evidence comes to light at a later date, or if an error in fact or law is found in the Appeal decision.

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Breakdown of Decisions Issued by VRAB



Volume of Favorable Decisions



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Highlights

- To enhance access to disability benefits for Veterans, the Board developed an Early Resolution Process with the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, which helps to resolve simple/single issue claims in an informal, streamlined process. These claims require minimal evidence to support the claim.
- Over the year staff received training in Plain Language Writing, Medical Terminology, Excel, and staff in leadership and supervisory roles also received training on Influencing Skills and Conflict Management.
- In December 2023, the Board published our first progress report on our Accessibility Action Plan, which highlights actions taken over the past year to create a barrier-free and inclusive workplace.
- With the support of the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada, the Board was successful in obtaining temporary and permanent funding as a result of our Budget 2023 request. This funding will help us increase our capacity to reduce wait times and improve services for Veterans.

- As part of the Board's ongoing commitment to Diversity and Inclusion, we hosted cultural education sessions for staff and Members. This included an Indigenous beading workshop led by Experience Lennox Island, an Acadian Storyteller for National Acadian Day and a commemorative wall during the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.



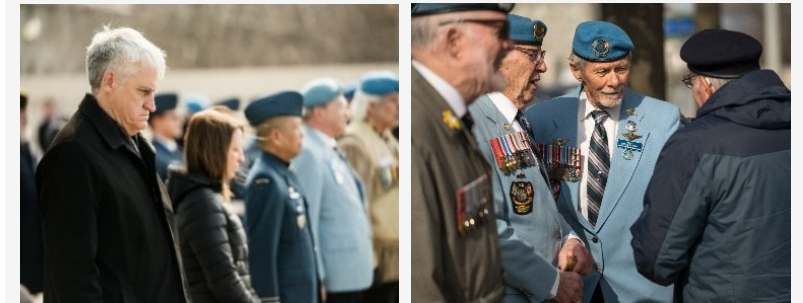
Veterans Week 2023

- VRAB officials participated in events across the country to commemorate our Nation's Veterans and honour the sacrifices they made and continue to make so that we can live freely.



60th Anniversary of Canadian Peacekeeping Operations in Cyprus

- The Chair attended the 60th Anniversary of the Canadian Armed Forces Peacekeeping Operations in Cyprus to honour the Canadians who participated, and continue to participate, in the peacekeeping efforts.



Valentines for Vets

- As part of the Valentines for Vets campaign, staff at the Board created 55 hand-made Valentines which were delivered to Veterans living in long-term care facilities across the country.



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Stakeholder Meetings and Events

- To stay connected to Veterans, the Chair attended many events and meetings with Veteran groups over the past year to hear first-hand about the issues that Veterans and their families face.



National Stakeholder Summit



Women Veterans Forum

- One of the goals of our new Strategic Plan is to continue to enhance the Veteran-centric approach to our work at the Board. This includes ensuring staff understand our mandate and values.
 - To help staff learn more about those we serve, new staff attend an in-person hearing as part of their onboarding process.
 - To better support all Veterans through care, compassion, and respect we provided information sessions to staff and Members on topics like post-traumatic stress disorder, the LGBT Purge Class Action, and peace-keeping. Members also received additional sessions on Writing for Clarity, Medical Policies, and Wellness and Resilience.
- To promote Health and Wellness, staff received presentations on Self-care and Meditation, Mental Health & Wellness, Suicide Awareness, and Civility in the Workplace.
- As part of the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign, VRAB staff and Members raised over \$9,000 for charities across Canada.
- To show our appreciation and gratitude to Veterans, the Board attended many commemorative events to honor those who have served.

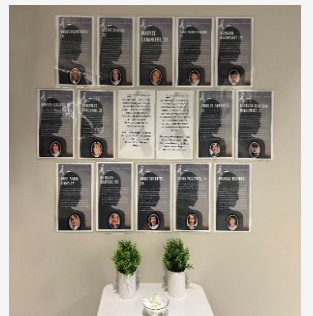
25th Anniversary of Operation Persistence, the Swissair Flight 111 Response

- In September 2023, our Chair and Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Shawn Williamson, employee of VRAB, attended the commemoration events for the 25th Anniversary of Operation Persistence, the Swissair Flight 111 Response. Mr. Williamson was part of the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the crash of flight 111 in the waters around Peggy's Cove.



National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

- To honour the memory of the 14 victims of the École Polytechnique Montreal murders and to raise awareness about the impact of violence against women, the Board organized a special display that shared the stories of each of the 14 women whose lives were tragically cut short.



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Contact Information

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