**Veterans Review and
Appeal Board Canada**

**Tribunal des anciens combattants
(révision et appel) Canada**

Veterans Review and Appeal Board 2024 Accessibility Progress Report

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Table of Contents

Note: As of the date of publication, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's 2024 Accessibility Progress Report has been verified for accessibility. If you have any issues with this Report, please contact the Board by email at VRABAccessibility-AccessibilitéTACRA@vrab-tacra.gc.ca, or else by telephone, mail, or anonymously using the contact information provided on pages 7 and 8.

1. General

1.1 Introduction message

On 11 July 2019, the *Accessible Canada Act* (Bill C-81) came into force. The Act seeks to make Canada barrier-free by 1 January 2040.

The Act also requires federally regulated entities, including the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (the Board; the VRAB) to develop an accessibility action plan to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers under federal jurisdiction in the following priority areas:

- employment;
- the built environment (buildings and public spaces);
- information and communication technologies;
- communication, other than information and communication technologies;
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities;
- the design and delivery of programs and services, and
- transportation.

The VRAB's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan (the Plan) identifies several actions to prevent and remove accessibility barriers in priority areas and, importantly, identifies additional actions to support the Board in advancing its accessibility culture shift.

It should be noted that while the VRAB is responsible for publishing and maintaining its own accessibility action plan, the Board has a long-standing service relationship with Veterans Affairs Canada (the Department, VAC) for internal services under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU outlines the agreement between the two organizations regarding their shared resources. Accordingly, the Board continues to benefit directly from VAC's efforts to improve accessibility in many of the corporate pillars. Some of the services the Board receives from VAC under the established MOU include:

- human resources;
- information technology;
- procurement;
- finance, and
- communications.

The Board is proud to release this 2024 Accessibility Progress Report, which highlights our progress since the Board's 2022-2025 Plan was released. This 2024 Accessibility Progress Report does not cover the entire 2024 calendar year, given the time that was required to have the Report approved and published in December. Any progress made

in 2024 that is not included in this Report will be addressed in the Board's 2025-2028 Accessibility Action Plan.

The Board also notes that its 2024 Accessibility Progress Report serves as an opportunity to review the commitments in its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, including updating and refining certain barriers, action items, and timelines.

Through the VRAB's accessibility action plans and related progress reports, the Board aims to create an environment where persons with disabilities can fully participate and contribute, whether when coming to the Board for decisions, or as Members or staff of the Board. The July 2024 edition of the Board's Pulse Survey invited staff and Members to indicate their level of comfort in discussing accessibility at the VRAB, as well as their level of accessibility awareness. The results of this survey provided a baseline the Board can use to measure progress on its accessibility culture shift now and into the future.

The VRAB continues to work diligently to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers so that Veterans and their family members can fully participate in their dealings with the Board, and Members and staff can work to their full potential, resulting in enhanced service to Veterans and Canadians. The VRAB embraces the opportunity to report back annually on progress, and to strengthen its performance measurement capacity. Through updated accessibility action plans and progress reports, the Board holds itself to account, and will also respond to the Clerk of the Privy Council's [Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion](#).

1.2 Progress at a glance

In December 2022, VRAB released its Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 with 59 actions to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. In 2023 and 2024, the Board focused on streamlining efforts to prevent and remove these barriers and now reports on 45 actions.

Of the 45 actions identified in the Accessibility Progress Report 2024:

- Eight actions are complete.

- Three actions are in progress.

  o These actions require consistent monitoring, such as providing in-home IT support to employees. At this time this is not offered, however the Board is working to ensure employees feel supported when they work from home.

- 10 actions saw the dates of completion shifted and are in progress.

  - Delays occurred because of a reliance on VAC or other organizations.

- 24 actions are ongoing efforts and all are in progress.

  - Examples of actions that are ongoing efforts relate to barriers in technology or training. The Board continuously seeks the most up-to-date and accessible solutions in areas that evolve quickly, such as these.

- All 45 actions have an impact on how the Board serves Veterans and their families. The Board is proud to note five actions that have immediately removed barriers for those we serve, including:

  - User testing, by persons with disabilities, of our external website.

  - The introduction of five accessible videos that help Veterans, and their families feel familiar with the Board's processes and communicate the commitment to Veterans. These videos include closed captioning and plain language.

  - The development and release of a new brochure, available in print and digital versions. This brochure has been added to the Board's website and includes accessible headings and alternate texts to support the use of screen-readers.

1.3 Message from the Chair

I am pleased to share the Board's second annual progress report on our 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan. This 2024 Progress Report highlights work accomplished over the past year, while also reminding us of the work that remains. The Board continues in its efforts to create an accessible and inclusive environment for those who work for the VRAB, and to ensure that every Veteran who appears before the Board can fully participate in the process.

Throughout the past year, the Board had the opportunity to consult with Veterans through two roundtables on accessibility, which were co-hosted with Veterans Affairs Canada. The information received from these sessions was extremely valuable and will be taken into consideration as we continue to remove and prevent accessibility barriers.

Our staff and Members are broadening their awareness and understanding of what accessibility means and why it matters and are working to ensure that products created by the Board for internal and external audiences are accessible by default and inclusive by design. This will enhance our service delivery to Veterans and their families and will improve the VRAB as a workplace.

The Board shares the vision of a barrier-free Canada by 2040 and looks forward to continued work as we strive for greater inclusion for all.

Thank you,

Christopher J. McNeil, Chairperson

1.4 Accessibility statement

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is committed to providing inclusive and accessible service through the following fundamental accessibility principles:

- everyone is treated with dignity;
- everyone must be able to participate fully and equally;
- laws, regulations, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the ways that different kinds of barriers and discrimination intersect, and
- persons with disabilities must be involved in developing and designing laws, policies, programs, and services.

The Board's goals are to ensure that all Veterans can fully participate in the redress process and to provide a barrier-free, inclusive workplace for all Board Members and staff.

2. Process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback

The Act and the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) require federally regulated entities, including the Board, to establish a process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback.

Feedback on accessibility can include comments on:

- the implementation of the Board's Accessibility Action Plan;
- accessibility barriers at the Board;
- how accessibility barriers at the Board can be prevented and/or removed, and
- accessibility best practices or success stories related to accessibility at the Board.

An accessibility barrier is anything that does not allow persons with disabilities to be included and take part in all areas of life and society. Barriers prevent persons with disabilities from taking part in the same way that persons without disabilities can. The Act identifies five types of accessibility barriers:

- physical or architectural
- technological
- related to information and communications
- attitudinal
- systemic

2.1 How to provide your feedback

2.1.1 Feedback for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Please send questions or feedback related to the VRAB's Accessibility Action Plan, or accessibility at the VRAB in general, in any of the following ways:

2.1.1.1 Email

VRABAccessibility-AccessibilitéTACRA@vrab-tacra.gc.ca

2.1.1.2 Phone

Toll-free:
English: 1-800-450-8006
French: 1-800-368-0859
TDD/TTY: 1-833-998-2060

2.1.1.3 Mail

Director General
Veterans Review and Appeal Board
Post Office Box 9900
Charlottetown PE, C1A 8V7

2.1.1.4 Online

Through the [anonymous feedback form on the VRAB's website](#).

2.1.1.5 Alternate formats

Note that you can use the contact information above to request the following documents in alternate formats:

- the VRAB's Accessibility Action Plan;
- the VRAB's description of its accessibility-related feedback process;
- the VRAB's annual progress reports on the implementation of the VRAB's Accessibility, and
- Action Plan and how feedback is being taken into consideration.

Alternate formats include:

- Print;
- large print (increased font size and clarity);
- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers);
- audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud), and
- electronic (an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities).

3. Areas described under section 5 of the Act

3.1 Employment

Desired outcomes:

- Job seekers with disabilities see the Board as a workplace of choice.

- Job seekers and public servants with disabilities have access to employment opportunities at the Board and can contribute to their full potential.

3.2 Employment barrier #1 – Inclusive hiring

- Persons with disabilities may be under-represented in the VRAB's hiring, acting appointments, and promotions. This could be due to one or more of the following factors:

  – persons with disabilities having difficulties with, and higher drop-off rates in, selection processes (as compared to persons without disabilities);

  – lack of skill development opportunities for persons with disabilities, including language training, to support career growth and development;

  – persons with disabilities not self-identifying, and

  – the VRAB not being perceived as an accessible and inclusive workplace.

3.2.1 Actions for employment barrier #1

- Use VAC's expanding tools for more accessible and inclusive hiring with the goal of closing the representation gaps for persons with disabilities:

  – implement an "Attestation of Impartiality and Diversity Form", where selection board members can document that they belong to equity seeking communities;

  – where appropriate, work with VAC to use the planned repository of names of qualified equity-seeking community members who are interested in participating in assessment boards;

  – incorporate an "Articulation of Selection Decision Form" that highlights key employment equity considerations in the selection of candidates, and

  – work with VAC to access their planned Accommodation Assessment Ambassadors (among staffing advisors), to support hiring managers in offering timely and appropriate accommodation measures during staffing processes.

- Tailor initiatives to support recruitment and career development of persons with disabilities:

  – coordinate sessions for VRAB Directors and Managers to promote diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including the demystifying of common misunderstandings associated with the recruitment of persons with disabilities, and

  – continue to consider opportunities for additional hiring through programs such as the [Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities](#), which has been extended for an additional five years.

- Promote the VRAB as an inclusive workplace for employees with disabilities:

  – undertake a review of language used in recruitment communications to ensure it is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive;

  – offer opportunities for VRAB staff to participate in a VAC-led learning series on "How to Apply on a Process", including a session and/or content tailored to persons with disabilities, and

  – Undertake a review of onboarding materials to ensure they include links to accessibility-related supports, and how to obtain them.

    ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023
    ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    ♦ **Status:** Complete

3.2.2 Progress on employment barrier #1

- The Board has implemented the "Attestation of Impartiality and Diversity Form," which provides a commitment to impartiality and an unbiased assessment, as well as the opportunity for voluntary self-identification of selection board members who belong to equity-deserving groups. The modernization of the self-identification process is anticipated to be launched by Central Agencies by December 2024.

- As of September 2024, VAC's repository of names of qualified equity-seeking community members who are interested in participating in assessment boards is in its final stage of creation.

- The Board is using the Articulation of Selection Decision document, which guides managers in describing and documenting their selection decision when appointing a candidate. By requiring a fact-based explanation of appointment decisions, the document seeks to hold organizations accountable in ensuring staffing is as unbiased as possible.

- The Board is working with VAC to access their Assessment Accessibility Ambassadors as required to support hiring managers in offering timely and appropriate accommodation measures during staffing processes.

- In 2024, VAC presented to VRAB leadership on the many options available for diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including the recruitment and hiring of persons with disabilities.

- Within the past two years, the VRAB hired an individual through the Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities. This program was set to end in March 2025, however, as it has been extended the VRAB will continue to seek opportunities to hire from within this program. The Board will also consider additional opportunities to run hiring processes directed towards persons with disabilities, including the following talent sources:

  - [The Virtual Door to Talent with Disabilities](#), and
  - [Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities (EOSD) – part of the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP).](#)

- The VRAB's employee recruitment communications, which are developed by the Board's Communications Team, are being written with consideration to plain language and GBA Plus, and use welcoming, accessible, and inclusive language.

- In 2024, the Board took steps to ensure the accessibility of its presentation on "How to Apply on a Process."

- The VRAB has also reviewed its onboarding materials to ensure they include links to accessibility-related supports, and how to obtain them.

3.3 Employment Barrier #2 – Obtaining accommodations, tools, and resources for persons with disabilities

The process for employees to obtain accommodations or tools and resources needed at work is complex. This also impacts managers, who do not feel equipped to recruit, develop and support persons with disabilities.

3.3.1 Actions for employment barrier #2

- Work with VAC to implement a Duty to Accommodate (DTA) checklist for managers that includes links to resources, policies, practices and guidelines.

- Work with VAC to leverage their planned FAQs to demystify the Duty to Accommodate process for employees and managers, offering tips on what is necessary for efficient approvals of DTA requests, and how/where to seek support to prepare for the conversations.

- Create a process to ask employees about their accommodation and equipment needs.

- Explore the implementation of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport, and limit accommodations-related document requests when documents may not be required (or requirements can be minimized).

- Continue to leverage resources such as Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT).

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.3.2 Progress for employment barrier #2

- VAC has developed FAQs and checklists with respect to the Duty to Accommodate – resources that the Board is leveraging.

- Work is underway to introduce a Disability Management Unit at VAC. The Unit will introduce an improved and centrally coordinated approach to employee disability management, duty to accommodate, long term disability, workers' compensation and return to work using a case management approach. Through the Disability Management Unit, the Department will also be able to create a process to ask employees about their accommodation and equipment needs. The selection process is underway to resource a team for this unit and will be completed by December 2024.

- In 2024, the Board adopted the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport. In order to share information about the Passport, VRAB staff were invited to attend Passport-related information sessions led by VAC in 2024, including with the VAC Accessibility Network and the VAC Managers Network. Furthermore, as part of National AccessAbility Week (NAAW) 2024, the Board's Accessibility Lead coordinated an information session for VRAB employees regarding the Passport. The session was led by two members of TBS's Office of Public Service Accessibility. The Board also added a reference to the Passport in Letters of Offer in 2024, so it can be promoted to staff.

- The Board continues to leverage Shared Services Canada's (SSC's) Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program. For instance, the Board's onboarding checklist was written using AACT principles.

3.4 Employment Barrier #3 - Managerial Considerations

Managers may not consider operational requirements and related accessibility barriers when hiring persons with disabilities.

3.4.1 Actions for employment barrier #3

- Work with VAC to establish a process to ensure managers consider operational requirements and related accessibility barriers when hiring persons with disabilities, through education and awareness.

- Provide hiring managers with a list of VAC and VRAB specific software and indicate whether they are considered accessible.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** June 2024
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.4.2 Progress for employment barrier #3

- As of October 2024, VAC is planning to develop and launch Assessment Board Education Sessions. The sessions will increase accessibility awareness and skills of assessment board members and hiring managers, including those from the VRAB. The sessions will also help build knowledge of the requirement to establish a Statement of Merit Criteria and of the associated assessment tools that are barrier- and bias-free, and accessible by design. This training will help ensure that managers are thinking about accommodations for persons with disabilities throughout the hiring process, while supporting candidates to showcase their skills, competencies, and abilities in an obstacle- and barrier-free environment.

- The Board's progress in providing hiring managers with a list of software required for positions, along with information on their accessibility and any necessary support, is contingent on this information being provided by VAC. As of October 2024, VAC is involved in a working group with members of SSC's AAACT program to develop a standardized checklist for auditing existing software. Once VAC completes this task, VRAB hiring managers will be able to implement these best practices.

3.5 The built environment

Desired outcome:

- The VRAB's Head Office location and Hearing spaces across the country are fully accessible.

3.6 The built environment barrier #1 – Maintaining and enhancing accessibility standards

Respondents to the Let's Talk Veterans accessibility consultation conducted in Fall 2021 expressed the following concerns regarding the built environment where Veteran Hearings are held:

- poor ramps;
- difficulty navigating in a wheelchair or scooter;
- inaccessible parking, lack of parking nearby;
- need for more easily visible eye-level signage;
- lack of elevators, or elevators not functioning;
- no street-level entry;
- a feeling of sitting too close to the panel ("being interrogated"), and
- seating issues, including flexible seating arrangements where you can sit facing the door (often important for someone with PTSD or other trauma).

Veterans Affairs portfolio staff with disabilities (which includes VRAB staff with disabilities) have also identified physical and/or architectural barriers, including uncomfortable seating and inaccessible parking. Furthermore, workspaces may not always include specialized ergonomic equipment.

The VRAB also reviewed the report that was prepared following the consultation series on Accessibility regarding the Government of Canada workplace model (GC Workplace). Several barriers in the built environment (traditional office design) were identified including:

- a lack of accessible washrooms;
- meeting rooms without sufficient space for wheelchairs or walkers;
- overly crowded kitchen areas;
- work points that offered no relief from noise or bright light, and
- accessibility in shared spaces.

3.6.1 Actions for the built environment barrier #1

- Continue to maintain and enhance the accessibility within its head office location through physical and technological improvements.

    Note: The VRAB's Head Office location has been built according to the GC Workplace model, based on inclusive design principles which resolve or mitigate many of the barriers that existed in previous, traditional office designs. The Board's design considers a wide range of physical accessibility and ergonomic needs, as well as neurodiversity.

- Continue to monitor and advocate for greater accessibility with respect to Hearing locations in all other areas across Canada.

  ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Senior Management Team
  ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.6.2 Progress for the built environment barrier #1

- In 2023, the Board launched its Hearing Room Project. Through this project, the VRAB is assessing and identifying accessibility barriers and recommending improvements in the Board's Hearing rooms across the country.

- The VRAB recently established accessible parking for Veterans at its head office Hearing space in Charlottetown.

- The VRAB's Head Office location has an accessible and gender-neutral washroom that is available for Veterans and staff. While the Board does not have direct oversight of washroom facilities in other buildings where VRAB Hearings are held, Hearings that take place in Federal buildings, in accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act*, will are required to take any necessary steps to prevent or remove accessibility barriers that are reported.

- The Board continues to offer Veterans the choice of virtual and in-person Hearings.

- On March 15, 2023, VAC updated its Ergonomic Guidelines. These guidelines are available to the entire Veterans Affairs portfolio, including the VRAB, to assist staff in familiarizing themselves with the optimal setup for their individual needs.

- The Board has established an in-office ergonomic equipment lending library that is available to any in-office staff and Members who wish to use it.

- The Board has prioritized and promoted continued ergonomic assessments and has invested in ergonomic equipment for staff. In 2024, the Board continued to offer ergonomic assessments to staff to assist them with optimal setup for in-office and work-from-home workspaces. As reported in the Board's 2023 Progress Report, 30 staff had assessments completed; an additional 4 staff had ergonomic assessments performed in 2024.

- An audit of the VRAB's Head Office was conducted on September 22, 2023, and found three areas of deficiencies in relation to the requirements of the Canadian Standards Association standard B651-18: Barrier Free Design for the Built Environment, i.e.:

  – several doors exceed the push/pull force maximum;
  – tactile signage is lacking throughout the premises, and

- coat closet shelving is mounted slightly higher than the standard prescribes.

As of October 2024, VRAB continues to work with VAC's Real Property & Workplace Services (RPWS) to address the remaining accessibility issues that have been identified, including the doors with push/pull force exceeding the maximum and the coat closet shelving height exceeding the standard.

RPWS is responsible for VAC and VRAB's built environment. When site barriers are reported to VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team, RPWS follows a process for information capture, actions, progress details and outcomes. As part of regular activities and plans, RPWS also works closely with PSPC to ensure compliance with the *Accessible Canada Act* and the latest CSA B651-18 Standard.

3.7 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Desired outcome:

- The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) used by the VRAB can easily be used by all, including persons with disabilities.

3.7.1 ICT barrier #1 – Outdated technologies

The Let's Talk Veterans accessibility consultation did not identify any ICT barriers specific to the VRAB; however, VAC's Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) is a Client Relations Management (CRM) software that is shared with the VRAB. This client data repository and processing system was built on now-outdated technology and does not meet accessibility standards.

3.7.1.1 Action for ICT barrier #1

- CSDN functionality is being improved and transitioned into more modern CRM systems. As part of this change, a Client Service Application (CSA) will be developed for VRAB tracking, processing and reporting of work. In alignment with the Policy on Service and Digital, the CSA will use a client-centric approach to guarantee universal accessibility. Throughout its development, each feature will undergo thorough accessibility reviews, ensuring adherence to guidelines and an accessible, inclusive user experience. VAC's work toward accessibility will positively impact VRAB's CSA development. VAC is conducting accessibility audits of new platforms against the CAN/ASC EN 301 549:2024 requirements for information and communications technology products and services. Audit results will be turned over to development teams who will then remove the accessibility barriers identified. VAC has started the CSA accessibility audit in 2024; work will continue into the 2025 calendar year.

    ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** March 2026

- ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
- ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.7.1.2 Progress for ICT barrier #1

- As of October 2024, the Board's CSA development is in the initial stages. Sample dashboards are being created and features are being added for handling correspondence.

3.7.2 ICT barrier #2 – Web-based applications

Some web-based apps are not fully accessible. For example, My VAC Account – VAC's online service platform, which the Board accesses to send letters and messages to Veterans – is not fully compliant with the Harmonised European Standard (EN 301 549). The EN 301 549 Standard is the European standard of accessibility requirements in digital tools used to direct the European Union's decision-making in lifting accessibility barriers, which is quickly becoming a recognized global standard in ICT accessibility.

3.7.2.1 Actions for ICT barrier #2

- Existing digital products will be assessed against the EN 301 549.

- Moving forward, the Board will ensure that all new software meets this standard before it is implemented.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing. VRAB to contribute to planned VAC initiatives to further modernize systems
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress/Ongoing

3.7.2.2 Progress for ICT barrier #2

- The VRAB participates in VAC-led initiatives to make web-based apps used by the Board (e.g., My VAC Account) more accessible. For example, the Board works directly with VAC's My VAC Account team to make accessibility-related updates for the benefit of Board clients.

- In 2024, the Board also benefited from work led by VAC in 2023 to release an accessible re-design of My VAC Account in Beta. This has resulted in improvements, such as:

  - a modern and simple layout making it easier for Veterans to find what they are looking for;
  - the ability to upload multiple files at once;

– the ability to see history of a conversation when replying to a message, and
– the ability to sort applications within the "Track your applications" feature.

3.8 IT Operations and Security

Desired outcomes:

- The VRAB's Information Technology (IT) and Security systems are fully accessible.

3.8.1 IT operations and security barrier #1 – Software

Some of VAC's (and therefore the Board's) internal legacy desktop software (i.e., software provided by third party vendors) is not fully accessible. The VRAB is dependent on VAC IT, Shared Services Canada (SSC) and/or third parties to make the necessary changes to improve accessibility. The following software used by VRAB employees is not fully accessible:

- Microsoft 365
- GCdocs
- Foxit

3.8.1.1 Action for IT operations and security barrier #1

- The VRAB's Systems unit will seek support from VAC's IT Operations team on any accessibility audits to identify fixes to internal desktop software and will take action where needed to make upgrades and/or replacements.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, SSC, third parties, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.8.1.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #1

- In 2024, as part of work underway to replace GCdocs with Microsoft Sharepoint Online as the VAC Portfolio's official corporate repository, Microsoft Sharepoint has been assessed for accessibility against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the Harmonised European Standard (EN 301 549) for accessibility. The target date to fully replace GCdocs with Microsoft Sharepoint at the VRAB is February 2025. The Board will work with the VAC Sharepoint migration project team toward implementation and ensure accessibility assessment is considered.

3.8.2 IT operations and security barrier #2 – Operating systems and mobile devices

Some accessibility features of VAC's (and thus the VRAB's) operating system and mobile devices are unavailable due to compatibility and security concerns.

Although Windows operating systems and mobile devices have built-in accessibility features that can be turned on by the user, any items that require deactivation by VRAB or VAC IT administrators require an alternate installation process or tools that meet the requirements of the specific user.

3.8.2.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #2

- Participate in evaluations (by VAC and/or SSC) of additional accessibility features of VAC's operating system and mobile devices that can be enabled.

- When an accessibility feature is requested, VRAB IT consults with VAC IT colleagues to explore safe and secure methods to enable functionality. If safe and secure methods to enable the accessibility feature do not exist – e.g., if enabling a feature requires the storage of user data outside the borders of Canada - alternative approaches are identified.

  - **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, SSC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - **Status:** Complete

3.8.2.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #2

- All accessibility features of VAC's operating system are enabled and available for employees to use. There are some accessibility features that are disabled by default on mobile devices due to security concerns. The disabled accessibility features on mobile devices can be enabled through a request to Shared Services Canada's AAACT Team.

3.8.3 IT operations and security barrier #3 – Purchasing processes for new software

The current purchasing process for new software and hardware does not include a standard accessibility evaluation.

3.8.3.1 Action for IT operations and security barrier #3

- Develop a standard accessibility evaluation for the Board, with the assistance of VAC IT and SSC. Incorporate this evaluation into the purchasing process for new software and hardware.

  - **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, SSC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate

♦ **Status:** In progress

3.8.3.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #3

- As of October 2024, this work is being undertaken by VAC in collaboration with Shared Services Canada's AAACT group.

3.8.4 IT operations and security barrier #4 – Technical training on accessibility features

There is currently no technical training provided regarding the accessibility features on VAC's (and the VRAB's) systems, applications, and devices.

3.8.4.1 Action for IT operations and security barrier #4

- Work with VAC to use any planned technical training for VRAB Members and staff (where appropriate) on accessibility features of relevant systems, applications, and devices.

    ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
    ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.8.4.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #4

- In 2024, the Board has continued to promote accessibility-related training available through the CSPS, including: "Making Documents Accessible" (course number - INC1-V46).

- Board Members and staff can also access technical training regarding accessibility features on the Department's (and the Board's) systems, applications, and devices through VAC's IT Training portal. This portal includes an Accessibility Learning Path for six software programs that are used daily by VRAB staff: MS Teams, MS Word, MS Outlook, MS Excel, M365, and MS SharePoint.

3.8.5 IT operations and security barrier #5 – Promotion of accessibility enhancements

Accessibility enhancements (to systems, applications, and devices) are not communicated or promoted to VRAB Members and staff.

3.8.5.1 Action for IT operations and security barrier #5

- Work with VAC, and the VRAB's Communications team to identify, communicate, and promote accessibility enhancements to systems, applications, and devices, where appropriate.

    - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
    - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.8.5.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #5

- The Board continues to work with VAC to identify, communicate, and promote accessibility enhancements to systems, applications, and devices. Any enhancements to the Board's tools are communicated by VAC through emails to staff of VAC and the Board, and often through more detailed and informative Tech Talk sessions offered by VAC. The Board also issues subsequent communications to VRAB staff in the context of Board events and activities to ensure staff are aware of accessibility enhancements that have been made available.

- In 2024, the VRAB's Communications team developed and shared with staff and Members the Board's first accessible PowerPoint template.

3.8.6 IT operations and security barrier #6 – In-home support

For numerous reasons, such as capacity, location, and health and safety, providing in-home support for tasks such as equipment set-up has not been possible.

3.8.6.1 Action for IT operations and security barrier #6

- Identify options to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities.

    - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024
    - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, SSC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.8.6.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #6

- The VRAB will review options available to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities, including those currently being explored by VAC and SSC's AAACT group, which would see VAC contract out these in-home services.

3.9 Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP)

Desired outcome:

- The VRAB's Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) management procedures, requests, and internal software are accessible for all users and requestors.

3.9.1 ATIP barrier #1 – Software

The software used by the VRAB's ATIP unit – i.e., VAC's ATIP request processing software, AccessPro Case Management (APCM) – has accessibility issues for users. Furthermore, the response packages provided to requestors do not meet Canadian accessibility standards. VAC is currently working with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) to procure a contract for new processing software.

3.9.1.1 Action for ATIP barrier #1

- Work with VAC to implement new processing software that is accessible and will provide accessible response packages to requestors. The Board will follow VAC guidance regarding the replacement and implementation of ATIP processing software and will align with the Department on its solution to ensure consistency with application support.

    - **Completion of all Actions by:** February 2025
    - **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    - **Status:** In progress

3.9.1.2 Progress for ATIP barrier #1

- The Board (VRAB) is working closely with VAC IT to launch ATIPXpress by January 2025 and make it fully operational by February 2025. The software will improve the accessibility of the ATIP process for both staff and the Canadian public by streamlining document sharing and ATIP request processing to ensure timely responses. The software includes a collaboration tool, making it easier for VRAB staff to share documents with the ATIP office.

3.9.2 ATIP barrier #2 – Written communications

The VRAB's written communications with ATIP requestors through email and/or letters are not fully accessible.

3.9.2.1 Action for ATIP barrier #2

- The VRAB's ATIP, IT and Communications teams will work with VAC, as appropriate, to implement updates to email and letter templates.

    - **Completion of all Actions by:** June 2025

- ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
- ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.9.2.2 Progress for ATIP barrier #2

- The VRAB's ATIP unit has reviewed its suite of letter templates to requestors for opportunities to clarify and simplify language in both English and French. Letter templates have been updated to make them more user friendly for staff, which allows the VRAB ATIP unit to respond more quickly while reducing user errors and being more accessible. As of October 2024, the Board is proceeding with ensuring the updated letter templates meet or exceed the Harmonised European Standard (EN 301 549). This will include making the templates fully accessible when viewed by the client who receives them.

3.9.3 Websites hosted by TBS

The following websites used by VRAB, hosted by Treasury Board Services (TBS) are not fully accessible:

- ATIP Online Request Service
- Open Government website

3.9.3.1 Action for ATIP barrier #3

- Participate in TBS-led discussions on recommendations to improve accessibility for websites as requested.
  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** TBS, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** Complete

3.9.3.2 Progress for ATIP barrier #3

- In 2024, the Board confirmed that accessibility concerns relating to Open Government or the ATIP Online Request Service `can be forwarded to TBS.

3.10 Communication (other than ICT)

Desired outcomes:

- All Board communications forms and templates are accessible.
- All published web content and communications products are accessible.

- VRAB staff are provided with what they need to design and deliver communications and events that are accessible to all.
- VRAB Members, staff, and clients are satisfied with the accessibility of Board communications.

3.10.1   Communication (other than ICT) barrier #1 – Concerns with communications

Respondents to the Let's Talk Veterans consultation noted the following concerns regarding the accessibility of Board communications:

- issues in navigating My VAC Account (which is used by the Board);
- accessibility issues related to forms;
- issues experienced in navigating the Board's website;
- complex language, and
- difficulty finding and understanding information related to practices and procedures.

3.10.1.1   Actions for communication (other than ICT) barrier #1

- Ensure that all of the Board's Communication material templates pass accessibility standards checks (e.g., use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker to ensure accessibility of templates created using Microsoft applications, use the "Check Design Accessibility" feature to ensure the accessibility of templates created using Canva).

- Include training on VAC's Communications Style Guide, the Canada.ca Content Style Guide, as well as on the offerings of SSC's AAACT program, when onboarding VRAB employees.

- Conduct a review of the VRAB's web content with an accessibility lens and make updates where needed.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.10.1.2   Progress for communication (other than ICT) barrier #1

- In 2024, as part of the Board's National AccessAbility Week 2024 celebrations, the VRAB's Communications team shared training opportunities on accessible communications and plain language with staff.

- In May 2024, the Board updated its "A Guide to Review and Appeal Hearings" resource, including ensuring the guide is accessible.

- Furthermore, in 2024, the Board's Communications team completed a thorough review of the VRAB's Annual Report template, including ensuring the template is accessible.

3.10.2   Communication (other than ICT) barrier #2 – User-testing

User-testing for the VRAB's external website does not include dedicated consultation with persons with disabilities.

3.10.2.1   Action for communication (other than ICT) barrier #2

- Offer opportunities for persons with disabilities (e.g., VAC's Accessibility Network) to participate in user-testing of the VRAB's website.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.10.2.2   Progress for communication (other than ICT) barrier #2

- As of October 2024, the Board's Systems and Information Management unit is working with VAC's Accessibility Network to assess the VRAB's external website to conduct user-testing by persons with disabilities.

3.10.3   Communication (other than ICT) barrier #3 – Events

In-person and virtual events are not always barrier-free

3.10.3.1   Action for communication (other than ICT) barrier #3

In-person and virtual events are not always barrier-free.

- The VRAB will promote accessibility features available to enhance the accessibility of virtual events (e.g., MS Teams closed captioning).

- In its communications around and invitations to VRAB events, the Board will provide participants the opportunity to indicate any accommodations needs and will ensure the accommodations are in place for the event.

- VRAB Communications unit employees will follow the Government of Canada's Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings standards and will seek to identify training opportunities specific to hosting accessible and inclusive events.

3.10.3.2   Progress for Communication (other than ICT) barrier #3

- In 2024, the VRAB's Communications team prepared a standard message to post at the beginning of virtual or hybrid events to ensure staff know that closed captioning is available.

- In November 2023, the Board offered simultaneous translation at an event for staff and Members during Veterans Week. The Board is now working collaboratively with VAC to determine a long-term solution for simultaneous translation.

- In 2024, the Board's Communications team began regularly consulting the GOC's Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings to look for best practices to incorporate at the Board to ensure events that are hosted, internally and externally, provide an inclusive and accessible experience for all attendees.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.10.4   Communication (other than ICT) barrier #4 – Videos

Not all of the Board's videos are accessible by default.

3.10.4.1   Actions for communication (other than ICT) barrier #4

- Produce new accessible video content and ensure that future videos meet accessibility requirements.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** March 2023 and ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** Complete

3.10.4.2   Progress for communication (other than ICT) barrier #4

- In November 2022, the Board revamped its videos, ensuring they are accessible (for example, to include closed captioning and plain language).

- In May 2024, the Board produced two additional videos. The purpose of one video was to provide a general introduction to the Board and who we serve. The purpose of the second video was to communicate the Board's commitment to enhancing access to justice for Veterans and to issuing fair and timely decisions on disability claims and appeals. Both new videos include closed captioning and plain language, adding to the Board's existing complement of accessible videos.

These videos have been added to the Board's website and the audience can access a full transcript.

3.10.5 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #5 – Brochures

While the VRAB's brochures are available in paper and .pdf format, the .pdf format may not be fully accessible.

3.10.5.1 Action for communication (other than ICT) barrier #5

- Explore digital format options to increase the accessibility of its brochures.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** Complete

3.10.5.2 Progress for communications (other than ICT) barrier #5

- In 2024, the Board developed and released a new brochure. It is available in print and digital versions and has been added to the VRAB website. The new brochure has been designed with accessibility in mind, i.e.: accessible headings and alternate text have been used to support screen-readers.

3.11 The procurement of goods, services and facilities

Desired outcome:

- The goods and services procured by the Board are accessible.

3.11.1 The procurement of goods, services and facilities barrier #1 – Procurement and contracting

Board staff may not be familiar with accessibility considerations, guidance, or best practice requirements for accessible procurement and contracting.

3.11.1.1 Action for the procurement or goods, services and facilities barrier #1

- Ensure that staff of the Board's Administration and IT units attend sessions offered by VAC Procurement (offered twice annually) regarding accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.11.1.2 Progress for procurement of goods, services and facilities barrier #1

- Staff from the Board's Administration unit and IT attended the September 2024 offering.

3.12 The design and delivery of programs and services

Desired outcome:

- VRAB staff are equipped to design and deliver programs and services that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

- Persons with disabilities are satisfied with the accessibility of VRAB programs and services.

3.12.1 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #1 – Accessibility of forms, fact sheets and letters

Some of the Board's forms, fact sheets and letters are not fully accessible.

3.12.1.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- Ensure that all standard client communiqués (e.g., forms, fact sheets and letters) meet accessibility standards.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.12.1.2 Progress for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- The VRAB continues to leverage My VAC Account as a tool for clients to submit documentation. In 2024, eleven client-facing forms were prioritized to be made fillable and My VAC Account-enabled so that Veterans and their families can access, fill and submit the forms directly through My VAC Account.

3.12.2 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #2 – Early collection of client accommodation requirements

There is no formal process between the Board and VAC, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (the BPA), or the Royal Canadian Legion (the RCL) to communicate a client's accommodation requirements. By collecting this data in an established/standardized way early in the process, the Board will be able to better meet the needs of those we serve.

3.12.2.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #2

- Consult with the BPA and the RCL on how best to identify when a client has accessibility needs in advance of a Hearing.

- For self- or privately-represented clients, develop a process to communicate directly with these individuals regarding their accessibility requirements.

- As required, adjust Hearing approaches to ensure the accessibility needs of Veterans and their families are met.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.12.2.2 Progress for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #2

- In 2024, the Board worked with the BPA and VAC to establish a process to communicate a client's accommodation requirements in advance of their Review Hearing.

3.12.3 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #3 – Accessibility training for Members and staff interacting directly with Veterans

VRAB Board Members and staff who are responsible for interacting directly with Veterans may not have been provided clear guidance on how to deal with clients with accessibility issues. This includes:

- staff who answer client inquiries by telephone, My VAC Account or email;

- contracted Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, who are responsible for greeting, escorting, and supporting Veterans during their in-person Hearing;

- staff who support Hearings at the VRAB Head Office, and

- Members who conduct Hearings.

3.12.3.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #3

- Explore training for Board Members and/or staff and/or contractors who interact with Veterans with disabilities to ensure they are equipped to do so with accessibility considerations in mind, and will:

  - consider additional training for Board Members to be included in onboarding;

– review and confirm the effectiveness of current mandatory courses for staff, and

– include accessibility content as part of the VRAB's Canadian Corp of Commissionaires onboarding session (offered bi-annually).

- ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and ongoing
- ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate and VRAB Member Secretariat
- ♦ **Status:** In progress

3.12.3.2 Progress for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #3

- As of October 2024, the Board's Professional Development and Training Unit is executing a thorough review of the mandatory training list for Members and staff. Once complete, Members and staff will be better equipped to interact with Veterans who require accessibility considerations.

- The Commissionaire's Manual states that commissionaires will be sensitive to the needs of in-person Hearing applicants as they may be experiencing serious physical or mental health injuries.

3.13 Transportation

The VRAB has carefully reviewed all of its policies, practices, programs and services, and has determined that there are no barriers in the area of Transportation at this time.

4. Consultations

The Board obtained the views of persons with disabilities in the development of this Progress Report through internal consultation with VAC's Accessibility Network, as well as external consultation with Veterans.

Internal Consultation

A draft version of this report was distributed to all Accessibility Network members for their feedback before the October 2024 Network meeting. The option to contact the Board through email or telephone to discuss the report was also made available.

Network members noted the following:

- It is a comprehensive document which appears well thought out.

- The Board could note training that is geared specifically toward training managers on how to successfully and respectfully help individuals with accommodation needs to work.

- The Board could note the process for Members and staff to take if they don't feel accommodated in their work.

  - The Board follows the same accommodation process as VAC and will continue to monitor and communicate changes to this process to ensure staff and Members feel supported in their needs.

- The Board could provide additional information about gender neutral washrooms. It talks of accessible washrooms, but not gender neutral.

  - The Board has clarified through this Progress Report that its head office location offers an accessible and gender neutral washroom that is available to Members, staff and Veterans.

- The Board could do more to outline how VAC's Real Property Workplace Services ensures changes made in the built environment meet accessibility standards.

  - Through this Progress Report, the Board has described how, as part of regular activities and plans, the Real Property Workplace Services also works closely with PSPC to ensure compliance with the *Accessible Canada Act and* the latest CSA B651-18 Standard.

 All feedback received was considered, and either incorporated into this report or retained for future consideration. The Board looks forward to continuing its work with the Accessibility Network in the identification of barriers and opportunities for improvement – all as part of its journey to becoming a more accessibility-confident organization.

External Consultation

In April 2024, the Board consulted with 10 members of the Ministerial Advisory Groups through a roundtable discussion panel held in cooperation with Veterans Affairs Canada. The roundtable was an important opportunity to obtain feedback from Veterans on the language and format of VAC's and the Board's Accessibility Action Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports. More specifically, the roundtable allowed VAC and VRAB to hear from Veterans about any accessibility barriers they may experience and any solutions they may propose, as well as in regard to report format and language.

Participants provided valuable feedback on the Board's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan and its 2023 Accessibility Progress Report:

- Veteran Experience

  - While VAC and VRAB have worked to educate themselves on the Veteran experience, Veterans may still have fear that they will face bias, etc.
  - In one-on-one conversations, Veterans may be in distress, and the tone used by either party can impact how the conversation progresses.

- VAC's and VRAB's Accessibility Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports are directed more so toward employees than external stakeholders; therefore there are aspects that do not resonate with Veterans.

- Formatting

  - VRAB's 2023 Accessibility Progress Report in PDF format is easy to read – something to maintain for all future Accessibility Action Plans and Progress Reports.
  - The formatting of VAC's and VRAB's Accessibility Action Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports may benefit from the addition of more hyperlinks.
  - Within VAC's and VRAB's Accessibility Action Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports, key topic headings should be linked to the correct area within the report so that readers do not need to scroll as much.

In response to this valuable feedback from roundtable participants, the Board is exploring opportunities for improvement. For instance, the Board is considering ways it can better signal to Veterans that when entering a VRAB office, they are entering a safe and welcoming environment. VRAB staff and Board Members will also continue to ensure that communication with Veterans is accessible and compassionate. The Board is seeking ways to collaborate with VAC when formatting its Accessibility Actions Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports with a view to achieving more consistency, and will use more plain language within these documents so that accessibility barriers and actions referenced are more easily understood.

5. Organizational culture

The Board is a fully accessible place of work, where Members and staff are supported in their own accessibility needs, and have the awareness, empathy, knowledge and skills to support others with accessibility needs.

5.1 Organizational culture barrier #1 – culture changes and adopting accessibility standards

5.1.1 Actions for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- Establish an Accessibility lead for the Board to ensure that this important work remains a priority and that it can maintain momentum toward these positive changes.

- Explore ideas such as establishing a VRAB "Accessibility Adopters" initiative to recognize and celebrate employees taking steps to incorporate more accessibility

into their day-to-day work and launching a "Storytellers" initiative to hear some of the lived experiences/stories of persons with disabilities.

- ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** 2024 and ongoing
- ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Senior Management Team
- ♦ **Status:** In progress

5.1.2 Progress for Organizational culture barrier #1

- In January 2024, the Board established an Accessibility Lead to guide the development and implementation of the VRAB's Accessibility Action Plans and Accessibility Progress Reports.

- The Accessibility Lead sat on VAC's Accessibility Network's National AccessAbility Week (NAAW) 2024 working group to assist in the coordination of a portfolio-wide panel discussion, "Fostering Accessibility Culture". The virtual event took place on May 30, 2024. Many VRAB staff attended and listened as colleagues shared their lived experience with disability.

- As part of NAAW 2024, the Board's Accessibility Lead coordinated an information session for VRAB employees regarding the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport. The session was led by two members of TBS's Office of Public Service Accessibility.

- The July 2024 edition of the Board's Pulse Survey invited staff and Members to indicate their level of comfort in discussing accessibility at the VRAB, as well as their level of accessibility awareness. The results of this survey provided a baseline the Board can use to measure progress on its accessibility culture shift now and into the future. 53 staff and Members (out of a possible 131) responded to the survey. Of those who responded:

  - 73% feel they have a good or very good understanding of what accessibility in the federal government means;
  - 74% agree or strongly agree they are comfortable talking with people in our organization about issues related to accessibility, and
  - 89% have attended a VAC, VRAB or Government of Canada event, training or webinar related to accessibility.

The Board is using the results of the accessibility-focused Pulse Survey to enhance awareness and understanding of accessibility by:

- Continuing to provide information and training to ensure staff and Members are informed about best practices and can actively engage in accessibility efforts.

- Encouraging managers to incorporate accessibility into team meetings and highlight accessibility features used in meetings and presentations.

Furthermore, in an effort to meet the needs of staff and Members, the Board continues to monitor and adapt accessibility-related communications and training.

The Board will also use the Pulse Survey results to inform the development of its next three-year Accessibility Action Plan (2025-2028).

6. Training

Desired outcome:

- Accessibility training for Members and staff (including managers) is offered regularly. Training documents created are accessible by default. E-learning modules are designed and created with accessibility in mind, so that all Board Members and staff will be able to fully and equally participate. The VRAB's training materials are available in various alternate formats, upon request.

6.1 Training barrier #1 – Promoting awareness and training for Members and staff

While the Board's mandatory training includes two accessibility-related CSPS courses (Gender-based Analysis Plus and Adopting an Inclusive Mindset at Work), as well as a course on Vicarious Trauma, Board Members and staff (including managers) may lack awareness, and may benefit from additional accessibility-related training.

6.1.1 Actions for training barrier #1

- The Board will offer and encourage Members and staff and managers to participate in accessibility training, workshops and information sessions including the Canadian School of Public Service (CSPS) course called Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility (INC115).

- Mandatory training for managers and supervisors at the Board will include the CSPS course called Disability Management and Workplace Wellness (INC120).
    - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by: Ongoing**
    - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
    - ♦ **Status:** In progress

6.1.2 Progress for training barrier #1

- According to the Board's 2024 accessibility-focused Pulse survey, 89% of staff attended events, training or webinars related to accessibility in the past year. Staff can find learning opportunities through the Canada School of Public Service, or respond to invitations they receive through internal communication channels.

6.2 Training barrier #2 – Onboarding and training of new Members and staff

6.2.1 Action for training barrier #2

- Ensure that the onboarding program, and any new training materials that are developed, are accessible. This includes inviting onboarding participants to identify any accommodations needs, as well as to provide feedback in regard to any accessibility barriers experienced during their onboarding or other training.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and Ongoing
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate
  - ♦ **Status:** Ongoing

6.2.2 Progress for training barrier #2

- In 2024, in its communications around and invitations to VRAB training opportunities, the Board provides participants the opportunity to indicate any accommodations needs and will ensure the accommodations are in place for the training.

7. Feedback

Together with the publication of its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, in December 2022, the Board created and published three mechanisms through which Members and staff, and/or members of the public, could provide accessibility-related feedback: mail, email, and telephone.

In 2023, the Board launched its anonymous online accessibility feedback form.

At the time of this Progress Report's publication, the Board had not received any accessibility-related feedback through these channels.

8. What we learned

The Board continues to advance in its commitment to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers.

We are pleased to see the progress toward removing barriers internally for our staff and Members and also for the Veterans and families that we serve.

2024 also reinforced the importance of continuing to put the "Nothing About Us, Without Us" principle into practice. The results of the Board's Pulse survey conducted in 2024 were encouraging: Board staff and Members indicated a high comfort level discussing their accessibility needs. Many also indicated they had taken part in accessibility-related

learning opportunities offered in 2024. Furthermore, the 2024 accessibility roundtable help with Veterans provided an opportunity to hear firsthand from those the Board serves in regard to its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan and 2023 Accessibility Progress Report. These consultations will continue to provide a strong foundation for the VRAB's ongoing work to ensure staff and Members feel supported in their own accessibility needs and can confidently support Veterans and their families who require support.

9. Glossary

For more definitions, please refer to the [Glossary of the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#) and the *Accessible Canada Act*.

Accessibility: The degree to which a product, service, program or environment is available to be accessed or used by all (Source: [Glossary: Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#)).

Accessible by design: This is a design process in which the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered. Accessibility sometimes refers to the characteristic that products, services, and facilities can be independently used by people with a variety of disabilities (Source: [Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology](#)).

Accessibility-confident: VAC staff understand what accessibility means and why it matters and are equipped to make the Department a more accessible and inclusive service provider and employer.

Accessibility Network: The Network provides the opportunity for employees with a disability, as well as their allies, to help identify accessibility barriers within the Department, and to provide feedback on the plans under development for a more accessibility-confident VAC. This group provides feedback and input based on their lived experiences and help guide VAC towards being a more accessibility-confident Department.

Accommodation: This term refers to the design and adaptation of a work environment to meet the needs of a diverse workforce and do what is required in the circumstances of each individual, to avoid discrimination up to the point of undue hardship.

Barrier: A barrier includes anything physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation (Source: [Accessible Canada Act, S.C. 2019, c. 10](#)).

Disability: Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society (Source: Accessible Canada Act, S.C. 2019, c. 10).

Duty to accommodate (DTA): Employers have a duty to accommodate employees to avoid discrimination based on the eleven grounds identified in section 2 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA). Employers must accommodate employees who fall into the groups protected by the CHRA up to the point of undue hardship (Source: VAC's internal Employment Equity and Diversity Action Plan 2017-2022).

Employment equity: The Employment Equity Act sets out requirements for Canadian employers, private and public, to proactively increase the representation of four designated groups: women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and visible minorities. (Source: VAC's internal Employment Equity and Diversity Action Plan 2017-2022).

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus): An analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. The "plus" in GBA Plus acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. GBA Plus also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability. By incorporating GBA Plus throughout VAC's policy, planning and operations, VAC will better understand how activities may impact Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP members, their families, and VAC employees.

GC Workplace Accessibility Passport: The Accessibility Passport is a tool that promotes collaboration between public service employees and managers. It will allow them to promptly identify and implement the devices, tools, and support measures that will enable employees to succeed in their job. The Passport is owned by the employee and will document adjustment needs, possible solutions, devices or supports received in the past, and adaptive tools that the employee would like to bring with them, should they change jobs or organizations.

Plain language: This refers to clear, straight-forward writing. It avoids obscure vocabulary and complex sentences. Writing in plain language does not mean over-simplifying or leaving out critical information. Using plain language makes critical information accessible and readable for everyone.

Screen reader: A screen reader is a software application that enables people with severe visual impairments to use a computer. (Source: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act)

Unconscious bias: An implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation or assumption that can occur without one's knowledge, control or intention. Unconscious bias is a result of

one's life experiences and affects all types of people. Everyone carries implicit or unconscious biases. Examples of unconscious bias include gender bias, cultural bias, race/ethnicity bias, age bias, language and institutional bias. Decisions made based on unconscious bias can compound over time to significantly impact the lives and opportunities of others who are affected by the decisions one makes. (Source: Creating an Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Research Environment: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention).

10. Appendix A: VAC terminology

For information on VAC's terminology, please refer to the Organization and Resources pages on the Veterans Affairs Canada website.

Accessibility progress tool: This tool, used by the Application Management Directorate, refers to automated and manual methods to track applications in scope; accessibility assessments completed on those; and EN 301 549 compliance status of each application as improvements are made over time.

Audit and Evaluation Division: This division has a dual role of providing both audits and evaluations for the Department. Audit provides independent and objective assurance as well as advisory services designed to improve operations within the Department. Evaluation judges the merit, worth or value of programs or services, based on the neutral collection and analysis of evidence. Evaluation informs decision making, improvements, innovation and accountability.

Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial: Located in northern France, this memorial stands as an important symbol of remembrance and a lasting tribute to all Newfoundlanders who served during the First World War. A great bronze caribou – the emblem of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment – forms the heart of the memorial.

Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA): BPA provides free advice, assistance and representation for individuals dissatisfied with decisions rendered by VAC with respect to their claims for entitlement to disability benefits, or any assessment awarded for their claimed conditions. The Bureau's advocates are dedicated exclusively to assisting clients in the redress process.

Canadian National Vimy Memorial: This memorial honours all Canadians who served during the First World War. It bears the names of those who died in France with no known grave and is located at the site of Canada's victory during the Battle of Vimy Ridge in northern France.

Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services (CFOCS): This branch is responsible for supporting VAC to meet Government of Canada requirements in areas such as financial stewardship, corporate reporting and key accountabilities. The branch also provides internal corporate services including human resources, finance, information

technology, information management, security and administration, procurement and contracting, integrated planning, and access to information and privacy activities.

Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN): This is an aging integrated system that supports VAC employees in delivering Departmental benefits and services.

Commemoration and Public Affairs: This branch is responsible for commemorating the achievements and sacrifices of those who served and continue to serve Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace. It also engages meaningfully with stakeholders and provides accessible, timely, accurate, clear, and objective communications services and products to Veterans, their families, VAC employees and Canadians in both official languages.

[Commemorative Partnership Program (CPP)](#): This program funds organizations who undertake remembrance initiatives that honour those who served Canada and keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

Corporate Secretariat: This division supports the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and Departmental senior management by coordinating Ministerial briefings, monitoring and supporting the Departmental governance committees, Parliamentary and Cabinet activities, as well as managing Ministerial correspondence and the Client Relations Unit.

European Operations: This division acts as a leader, steward and catalyst for remembrance overseas. The Division's mandate is to represent Veterans Affairs Canada in Europe on all matters that affect the commemoration of Canada's war dead and the contribution of Canadian Forces in times of peace and war.

Harmonised European Standard (EN 301 549): EN 301 549 is the European Standard for Digital Accessibility that the Government of Canada is adopting for ICT. The industry standard for web accessibility is W3C WCAG ([World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)). EN 301 549 includes WCAG plus accessibility standards for all other digital products, including mobile phones, electronic documents, software, and hardware.

[Funeral and Burial Program](#): This is a program administered by the Last Post Fund on behalf of VAC that provides funeral, burial and grave marking benefits to eligible Canadian and Allied Veterans.

GCcase: This is an integrated system that supports VAC employees in delivering Departmental benefits and services.

[Last Post Fund (LPF)](#): LPF is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that no Veteran is denied a dignified funeral and burial, as well as a military gravestone, due to insufficient funds at the time of death.

Let's Talk Veterans (LTV): LTV is an online accessible consultation and engagement platform launched in 2021 to give Canadians, Veterans and their families the opportunity to provide direct feedback to VAC.

My VAC Account: This tool is a public-facing client portal that enables Veterans to apply for benefits, send secure messages, and track applications online with VAC.

Office of the Veterans' Ombud (OVO): This Office ensures that Veterans and their families are treated fairly and have access to the programs and services that contribute to their wellbeing. They also study and recommend ways to make these programs better.

Service Delivery (SD): This branch is responsible for delivering benefits and services and for providing social and economic support that respond to the needs of Veterans, our other clients and their families.

Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance: This branch is responsible for ensuring that VAC programs and policies remain relevant and meet the current and future needs of our clients. This branch also developing strategic partnerships in support of program and policy development.

Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB): The Board provides an independent avenue of review and appeal for disability decisions made by VAC. If a client decides to appeal a disability benefits decision from VAC, they can choose to have a BPA lawyer present their case.

Veteran-centric: Veterans are at the centre of everything we do: our philosophies, our ideas, our operations. To be Veteran-centric means we are proactive, responsive and compassionate to the needs of Veterans and their families, and ensuring they have all the benefits and services for which they are eligible. We will continue to streamline our processes to make them easier to follow.

11. Appendix B: Other government departments and services

For more information, please refer to the Government of Canada list of departments and agencies.

Government of Canada ICT Maturity Model and Scorecard: The Government of Canada (GC) Accessible ICT Maturity Model and Scorecard identifies eight dimensions that are considered necessary to making ICT accessible to all. There are five maturity levels for each dimension. Level 1 is the initial level and level 5 is the optimizing level. There are key building blocks for each of these maturity levels.

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC): This department plays an important role in the daily operations of the Government of Canada as a key provider of

services for federal departments and agencies. PSPC supports them in the achievement of their mandated objectives as central purchasing agent, linguistic authority, real property manager, treasurer, accountant, integrity adviser, and pay and pension administrator.

Shared Services Canada (SSC): This department was created in 2011 to transform how the government manages and secures its information technology (IT) infrastructure. They deliver digital services to Government of Canada organizations, providing modern, secure, and reliable IT services so federal organizations can deliver digital programs and services that meet Canadians' needs.

Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology program (AAACT): AAACT is a Shared Services Canada program that provides services and solutions to help the public service serve all Canadians, including those with disabilities. AAACT provides expertise in accessible digital content ensuring GC products and services are available to everyone. They offer training, tools, and testing services to help departments create accessible digital content (e.g., documents, presentations, and web content) that is inclusive by design.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS): This secretariat is the administrative branch of the committee of ministers responsible for the financial management of the federal government (Treasury Board). It is a central agency of the Government of Canada. The role of the Secretariat is to support the Treasury Board and to provide advice to Treasury Board members in the management and administration of the Government.

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE): WAGE is the lead federal department responsible for advancing gender equality, including with respect to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada's economic, social, and political life.