



Veterans Affairs  
Canada

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VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA  
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN  
2001-2006

Canada

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## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Long ago, the Government of Canada made a solemn promise to its citizens that it would foster a nation that safeguards their values and improves their well-being. At Veterans Affairs Canada, we continue this proud tradition by serving a very special family of clients that includes traditional war service Veterans, Canadian Forces Veterans and still-serving members, survivors, dependents, eligible civilians, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Caring for those who have served and protected us is a privilege that brings us in daily touch with clients of many generations who often have complex and urgent needs. Their memories serve to remind us of their many sacrifices and achievements and how important it is to fan the flame of Remembrance at home and around the world.

To help us meet our responsibilities, the Department developed a *Five-Year Strategic Plan* in June 2001. This plan is carefully built on a strong foundation of client service, responsible planning, and thoughtful programs and services that add value to our client's quality of life and give voice to their role in helping to secure and preserve the freedom and peace that Canadians value so highly. Like all good plans, it is updated annually to reflect our progress, identify new opportunities and address new challenges.

UPDATE 2003 provides a snapshot of the Department's progress. It confirms we are on track in maintaining and enhancing the integrity of our programs and services and increasing the effectiveness of our organization. It contains eight priorities that will guide our efforts over the next three years. These priorities reflect the evolving needs of our clients, plus new and emerging realities at home and abroad.



**Update 2003 provides a snapshot of the Department's progress. It confirms we are on track in maintaining and enhancing the integrity of our programs and services and increasing the effectiveness of our organization.**

In UPDATE 2003, you'll learn how we plan to build on our long history of client service to war service Veterans to pioneer innovative policies and practices that offer all clients the right to live with dignity and independence. You'll discover how we plan to improve and expand services offered to Canadian Forces Veterans, many of whom are increasingly in need of our assistance. We'll talk about the many ways we're working in partnership with other government departments and agencies to better support members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other eligible civilians. You'll get a better understanding of why it's important that we continue to evaluate and refine the disability pension process so that it can adapt to, and support, the ever-changing needs of a very diverse community of Veterans. As well, we'll explore the valuable partnerships and tools that are planned or in place to help us shape the fabric of our nation's approach to Remembrance.

To help support the goals of our Department, UPDATE 2003 also provides insight on the many strategies we've put in place to nurture and support our most prized resources, namely our people, our information management and technology and our policy-making capacity. You'll learn how our human resources plan is designed to nurture the skills, knowledge and aspirations of our people as they work together to meet our Department's priorities. You'll discover how advances in information management and information technology are helping us to re-invent the way we do business so that clients are served better, our organization runs more efficiently and we fulfil our commitment to help make Government more electronically accessible to all Canadians, no matter where they live. And you'll have a better understanding of how our policy-making capacity is being strengthened to support better analysis of critical issues, better programs, better client support and greater accountability to those we serve, as well as all Canadian taxpayers.

UPDATE 2003 is our vision for the future and responds to Canadians who have told us they expect the Government of Canada to provide strong leadership in support of our Veterans. It offers Canadians tangible evidence that our Department continues to provide accountable, timely and appropriate client-centred programs and services to its diverse and evolving clientele.

As Minister responsible for Veterans Affairs Canada, I am proud of our numerous accomplishments. I am proud of our Department's enviable record of service to our Veteran community. And I am proud of the dedication of our staff throughout all our programs, services and Remembrance activities. At Veterans Affairs Canada, we will continue to honour and keep alive the memory and sacrifices of all our Veterans and law enforcement clientele. We owe each of them our debt of gratitude and, in return, we have made it our priority to strive to exemplify the high principles and values they so willingly defended.



**The Honourable Dr. Rey D. Pagtakhan, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Veterans Affairs

## DEPUTY MINISTER'S MESSAGE

As a young boy, I remember the esteem with which the Department of Veterans Affairs was held in our household. My father, a World War II Veteran, served his country with pride, and upon his return the Department was there for him, and later, his family. While it is true that our department's name has since changed to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), the original goals established through the Veterans Charter remain, and I am pleased to find continued high-levels of service and commitment to our traditional war service Veterans, Canadian Forces Veterans and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Being new to the Department is always a challenge. As incoming Deputy Minister I have considerable shoes to fill, but that task is made easier because of the good work of my predecessor, Larry Murray, and the Department's professional and committed staff. As one would expect with any new employee, I have spent my first few days at VAC getting acquainted with the Department. Part of this familiarization process has included a review of our planned activities, including the Department's *Five-Year Strategic Plan 2001 - 2006*, first released in June 2001.

The *Plan* was developed from a strategic standpoint, with a focus on our core departmental objectives and priorities, extended over a five-year planning horizon. As with any good plan, we review our stated goals and priorities on an annual basis to ensure continued

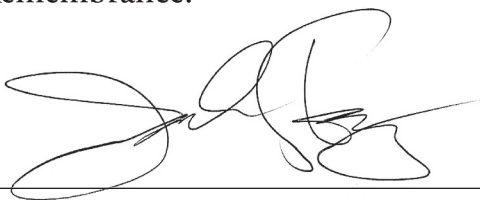


***Update 2003* is our annual check-up, a review of our strategic objectives and progress on our eight departmental priorities.**

relevance throughout the planning cycle, to identify new and emerging trends, and to address any challenges to our continued high-levels of service. UPDATE 2003 is our annual check-up, where we examine our strategic objectives of Integrity of Our Programs and Service Improvement and Organizational Effectiveness, review our progress and set our priorities.

During the course of the next three years, we will continue to work with clients and stakeholders to ensure access to programs and services that respond appropriately to the increasingly complex needs of our aging Veterans, their survivors and caregivers. At the same time, we will improve and expand services for Canadian Forces Veterans, provide leadership in Remembrance programming, evaluate the effectiveness of our disability pension process, and advance the development of our information technology capacity. We will also seek to enhance our policy capacity in support of evidence-based decision-making and better public accountability, transform service delivery and promote innovation in our policies and practices, and continue to develop and improve our partnership to serve the RCMP and eligible civilians.

Throughout my 29-year career with the Public Service of Canada I have learned that our most valuable resources remain our people. While I am new to VAC, I have already experienced first-hand the dedication and professionalism of our staff, and their caring and commitment to the clients we serve. Our staff continues to embrace the challenges of a rapidly evolving workplace and clientele while consistently providing high levels of service. UPDATE 2003 confirms our commitment to both staff and clients as we continue to move forward in the service of those so deserving of our respect, recognition and Remembrance.



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**Jack Stagg**  
Deputy Minister  
Veterans Affairs Canada

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When VAC's *Five-Year Strategic Plan 2001-2006* was originally developed and launched in June 2001, it identified ten priorities. The Plan is reviewed and updated annually to ensure that it continues to reflect current realities, emerging issues and new challenges.

At the same time, Departmental priorities are confirmed and/or adjusted to reflect progress achieved in certain areas and to focus attention on issues that require greater consideration. UPDATE 2003 identifies eight priorities that will guide our strategic efforts over the next three years.

UPDATE 2003 takes into account the operating environment within which our programs and services are delivered and our policies are implemented. It considers key factors - both internal and external - which influence the Department's planning and priority setting. The greatest challenges facing VAC remain the diversity of the people we serve and the complexity of their evolving needs. Among others, our client mix comprises aging war service Veterans with increasingly complex and sometimes urgent health care needs, younger Canadian Forces Veterans in need of assistance in the transition from military to civilian life, rehabilitation and counselling services, retired and still-serving RCMP members with unique needs, though not dissimilar from those of our CF clients, and spouses and children who often assume responsibilities as primary caregivers for aging and/or disabled Veterans. On a broader scale, our efforts extend to all Canadians who, as witnesses, active participants and contributors to our Remembrance activities, help to bestow honour on the men and women who serve Canada in military and peacekeeping operations.

External factors – an aging population, Canada's involvement in international operations, the implementation of health care reforms with provincial/territorial partners, emerging trends in service delivery, as well as the government's overall financial situation – and VAC's internal operating environment also exert an influence on the actions pursued by VAC to address client needs. VAC's strong support for and participation in Government-wide initiatives such as Government On-Line,

**The greatest challenges facing VAC remain the diversity of people we serve and the complexity of their evolving needs.**

Human Resources Management Reform, and Modern Comptrollership, will assist the Government in realizing key commitments made to Canadians. VAC recognizes that the time and resources devoted to these important initiatives have an impact on VAC's capacity to do more in other areas.

VAC also recognizes the critical role played by our staff in delivering our programs and services. Without doubt, VAC's greatest resource remains its dedicated and professional staff and we cannot overstate the importance of having the right people in the right place at the right time. The collective efforts of employees who interact with clients on a daily basis, as well as those who support their efforts, have resulted in an overall client satisfaction rate of 85% and 87% in two successive national surveys<sup>1</sup>. As an organization, we are all too aware of significant workload pressures placed on staff who, in responding to growing client needs, consistently provide high levels of service. UPDATE 2003 upholds our commitment to ensure that "people issues" remain front and centre as we move forward.

In today's environment of multiple and competing demands and limited resources, VAC is prepared to make choices and to direct its attention, energy and resources to issues of highest priority. The Executive team's decision to focus on fewer priorities reflects the need to adjust to new realities and respond to emerging issues. Our priorities also acknowledge the significant progress achieved in certain areas, notably Ste Anne's Hospital and Communications, since *VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan* was created in 2001. As a result of this progress, alternate plans/frameworks are now in place enabling VAC henceforth to guide its efforts in these two areas outside the framework of this Strategic Plan.

The *Ste. Anne's Hospital Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, approved in August 2002, sets out the strategic direction for the hospital for the next five years and establishes how it will continue to serve Veterans, capitalize on its expertise, and seek partnerships with other departments, provincial, national, and international organizations as well as research institutes. The Plan will serve as the framework governing the hospital's operations and involvement in strategic clinical initiatives such as dementia care, dysphagia, pain control and, through the Ste. Anne's Centre, the effective evaluation and management of operational stress injuries. The modernization project will provide a new physical environment as well as a revitalized workforce to better meet the needs of hospitalized Veterans.

<sup>1</sup> Findings from the National Client satisfaction Survey(NCSS) conducted in June 2001 and May 2003.



Similarly, the successful implementation of the VAC Communications Review recommendations, together with the steps taken to address the information needs and concerns of staff, clients and stakeholders, means that we are well-positioned on the communications front. Building on these accomplishments, future activities will be guided by VAC's Corporate Communications Plan for 2003-2004.

## **O U R   S T R A T E G I C   D I R E C T I O N**

The delivery of VAC's programs and services will continue to be guided by our longer-term Departmental vision, which is premised on maintaining our focus on core business with an expanded clientele. As such, VAC's strategic direction over the next three years will be focussed on continued service excellence to our war service Veterans, improvement of our services to Canadian Forces Veterans and still serving members, and increased partnerships to serve our RCMP clients. Continuing to instill a strong appreciation among Canadians for the sacrifices made by Veterans and others who serve our nation is an integral part of this strategic direction.

Today, VAC is well-positioned to address the needs of elderly war service Veterans whose advancing age and deteriorating health often intensify their health care needs. This is not to say that our work with and for this special group of Veterans has been completed. To the contrary, VAC will continue to work with clients and stakeholders to ensure access to programs and services that respond appropriately to the increasingly complex needs of aging Veterans, survivors and caregivers.

While the Department's proud tradition of evolving to meet the emerging needs of war service Veterans has led to the development of a solid program base for this client group, VAC's repertoire of benefits and services to meet the current and future needs of younger clients with different military experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is less well developed. Similarly, some of our work with the RCMP is in its early stages.

It is with this in mind that our strategic priorities for the coming years focus on building a modernized system of programs and services for other client groups, such as members and former members of the Canadian Forces and their families, the RCMP and eligible civilians.

Notwithstanding the additional emphasis placed on newer client groups, the Department is unwavering in its commitment to war service Veterans and their survivors. We will continue to serve this special group of Veterans with pride and honour as we move forward with efforts to more effectively respond to the needs of all our clients.

## OUR PRIORITIES

The eight priorities outlined in this Plan continue to support our two strategic objectives - **Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement** and **Organizational Effectiveness**.

Without doubt, it is the past and present contributions of our war service Veterans that have given us the freedom to look to the future. It is with this in mind that we will continue to ensure appropriate and compassionate responses to our **aging war service Veterans** while we move forward in new directions to meet emerging needs.

### Strategic Objective 1: Integrity of Our Programs and Service Improvement

- Transforming **service delivery** and promoting **innovation** in policies and practices
- Improving and expanding services for **Canadian Forces** Veterans and still-serving members
- Partnering to serve the **RCMP** and eligible civilians
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the **disability pension process** and its flexibility to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of our Veterans and other clients
- Providing strong leadership in **Remembrance** programming through effective partnerships

### Strategic Objective 2: Organizational Effectiveness

- Aligning our strategic **human resources** plan to support the goals of the organization and aspirations of our people
- Advancing the development of our **information management & information technology** capacity in support of service improvement, organizational effectiveness and Government-On-Line
- Enhancing our **policy capacity** to ensure more effective use of information and analysis in support of evidence-based decision-making and better public accountability

In pursuing our priorities and working together to recognize the long-standing commitment and debt of gratitude to Veterans, our employees will be guided by our mission, vision and values.

## OUR MANDATE

Veterans Affairs Canada exists to repay the nation's debt of gratitude toward those whose courageous efforts have contributed to our growth as a nation and have also served the broader goals of world peace and security.

In recognition of their contributions, VAC provides benefits and services to eligible Canadians who serve Canada in armed conflicts and peacekeeping missions, and honours their sacrifices and achievements in the pursuit of peace and the defence of freedom.

Our disability pension and economic support programs and related treatment and health care services are designed to meet the needs of Veterans who suffer from a service-related injury or are income qualified. Through community engagement, public information and research, and national and international memorials, VAC's Canada Remembers Program endeavours to keep alive the memory of our 20<sup>th</sup> century war service Veterans and the brave men and women who continue to serve in modern-day operations, including peacekeeping missions. As such, our activities serve to strengthen Canada's cultural identity and ensure that the legacy of Veterans' sacrifices and achievements are not lost for future generations.

The breadth of Canada's contributions to world peace and security is reflected in the highly diverse clientele served by VAC, including:

- Armed Forces and Merchant Navy Veterans who served during the First World War, Second World War, or Korean War
- Canadian Forces Veterans and still-serving CF members, including those who serve in peacekeeping operations and Special Duty Areas

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- Allied Veterans, predominantly those who lived in Canada prior to a period of war
- Certain civilians who are entitled to benefits because of their war time services
- Former and serving members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Survivors and dependents of the above-mentioned groups

Not surprisingly, the community we serve is changing. Few Veterans of the First World War are still living and the men and women who served in World War II and the Korean War are advancing in age. While many Canadian Force Veterans are in, or are approaching, their retirement years, there are also many younger CF Veterans and still serving members with recent service in peacekeeping missions and international operations, including East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda and Afghanistan.

As a learning organization, VAC not only recognizes, it embraces the challenge to respond effectively to our changing environment. We have a proud tradition of evolving to meet the changing needs of Veterans. In so doing, however, we remain a stalwart to the responsibility, given to the Department in 1944, for ... *“the care, treatment, or re-establishment in civil life of any person who served in the Canadian Forces or merchant navy or in the naval, army or air forces or merchant navies of Her Majesty, of any person who has otherwise engaged in pursuits relating to war, and of any other person designated ... and the care of the dependants or survivors of any person referred to ....”*

## OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

### OUR MISSION

To provide exemplary, client-centred services and benefits that respond to the needs of Veterans, our other clients and their families, in recognition of their services to Canada; and to keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

### OUR VISION

To provide exemplary service which honours the sacrifice and achievements of our Veterans and clients.



## **OUR VALUES AND ETHICS**

At Veterans Affairs Canada we value our clients' contributions to the development of Canada as a nation and honour the sacrifices they have made in the defence of freedom and the pursuit of world peace. In expressing Canada's gratitude to them, we strive to exemplify the high principles which they have defended.

### **Integrity**

We act with honesty and fairness and always strive to do the right thing.

### **Respect**

We treat everyone with respect. We recognize the dignity that is inherent in all people and celebrate the strength that comes from the diversity of people and ideas.

### **Service**

We take pride in our role as public servants and are dedicated to service excellence. We are committed to responsive, quality service, delivered with timeliness, courtesy, and fairness.

### **Accountability**

We are accountable and responsible for our actions and accept the consequences of our decisions.

### **Teamwork**

We value teamwork, and promote the principles of partnership, consultation and open communication.

### **Balance**

We encourage the achievement of a healthy balance in the working and personal lives of employees, believing that this contributes to the vitality of individuals, our organization and our communities.

## STAYING CURRENT: VAC'S STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING PROCESS

When the *VAC Five-Year Strategic Plan* was first launched in June 2001, the Departmental Executive Board (DEB) committed to an annual review and update of the Plan to ensure that it continues to reflect current realities, emerging issues and new challenges. In this way, the annual Update reflects the strategic environment within which VAC delivers its programs and services and confirms and/or adjusts the Department's priorities.

An annual strategic planning retreat provides an opportunity for the Executive team to reflect on progress achieved, to consider new issues and emerging trends, and to review developments associated with the *Five-Year Strategic Plan* and related strategic plans in the area of human resources, information technology/information management, communications, sustainable development, and risk management. Internal and external factors that are likely to have an impact on VAC's capacity to deliver on its mandate and to achieve its strategic objectives are also considered. Against this backdrop of multiple and competing demands, limited resources and new challenges, the strategic priorities that will guide the department's efforts in the coming years are identified.

Annual reviews were conducted as part of DEB's annual strategic planning retreats in September 2001 and November 2002. The planning cycle has since been adjusted to allow for the DEB strategic discussion to be held in the Spring, starting in 2004. This will ensure a better alignment between strategic planning and other departmental planning processes and will allow for the outcomes of DEB's discussions to be factored into annual human resource, IM/IT, and business planning and the notional allocation of resources.

A more comprehensive strategic planning exercise is conducted every five years, with the results serving as the basis for the renewal of the *Five-Year Strategic Plan*.

The illustration at Appendix A depicts the linkages with other departmental processes, which form part of our overall planning and reporting process.

## THE PLANNING ENVIRONMENT

The planning environment is characterized by a number of issues, challenges and realities, both internal and external in nature, that will continue to influence how Veterans Affairs Canada approaches its responsibilities and delivers programs and services to meet the evolving and increasingly complex needs of its clients.

### **An Aging Society**

The 2001 census put the Canadian population at just over 30 million, with the total population increasingly made up of older individuals. In 2001, 13% of the population was over the age of 65, and this is expected to increase to over 20% by 2021.

War service Veterans account for a substantial proportion of Canada's senior population. As of March 2003, 7% of all seniors were war service Veterans. The average age of Canada's war service Veterans is 80 years, with the thirteen known surviving Canadian World War I Veterans averaging 101 years of age, compared to Veterans of World War II and the Korean War whose average ages are 80 years and 71 years respectively. It is estimated that 309,000 war service Veterans are currently living in Canada. Ten years from now, this number is expected to decrease by two-thirds.

Although the composition of VAC clients is expected to change over the next few years as the elderly war service Veterans decline in numbers and the number of younger Canadian Forces Veterans and RCMP clients increase, the demographics suggest that VAC will continue to serve a large senior population. VAC will continue to monitor changes in the Veteran population and shifts in client demographics to ensure that our forecasts and forward planning reflect new realities and that our programs and services evolve to meet the changing needs of clients.

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At the same time, we are challenged to help position Canada's youth to take up the torch to carry forward the legacy of the sacrifices and achievements of our aging Veterans. VAC's ongoing efforts to educate and engage Canadians, especially youth, will play a major role in preserving this important aspect of our heritage for future generations.

## Health Care Reform

Taking into account the findings and recommendations from various commissions and studies, including the work of the Romanow Commission, Senator Kirby, and Messrs Fyke, Clair, Mazankowski, the February 2003 First Ministers' *Accord on Health Care Renewal* sets out a plan to improve access to quality care for Canadians and accelerate health care reforms in key areas. Bolstered by investments announced in Budget 2003, the Accord is intended to serve as the action plan for renewing and sustaining the health care system by ensuring better access to services such as primary care, diagnostic services, home care, palliative care and catastrophic drug coverage, along with increased transparency and accountability. Changes in how health care is delivered in Canada, the basket of programs and services covered by provincial health insurance plans, advancements in medical diagnostics, and new treatments and products are expected to have a positive impact on the health and quality of life of Canadians, including our Veterans and other clients. The implementation of health care reforms at the federal and provincial levels will merit close attention in terms of how they may influence the delivery of VAC programs and services. Changes in provincial health care budgets are already influencing VAC expenditures in VIP and treatment benefits. This is expected to continue.

At the same time, VAC has a valuable contribution to make to reform efforts by sharing best practices and lessons learned from its vast experience with the delivery of health care services and disability benefits to Canada's Veterans. For example, VAC has demonstrated expertise in administering a national home care program (the Veterans Independence Program), as well as innovations in tele-homecare and collaborative service delivery. As such, VAC may help to shape the design of new programs and services to enhance the quality of life for seniors in areas such as healthy living, home care, palliative and end-of-life care, and measures to support the full participation of persons with disabilities in Canadian society.

## Canada's Involvement in International Operations/Conflicts

Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism, our involvement in the UN mission to maintain peace and security in Afghanistan, and other modern-day operations elsewhere in the world could have future consequences for the Department. For example, the outcome of international conflicts may have an impact on the number of Veterans, still-serving Canadian Forces, and RCMP personnel looking to Veterans Affairs for assistance. Similarly, the changing nature of the risks encountered by Canadian troops in modern-day military deployments and the increased pace of deployments could lead to more service-related injuries and illness and influence the nature of the programs and services required. In addition to potential implications for our disability pension, health care, and treatment benefits programs and specific CF-related initiatives, the content and delivery of VAC's Remembrance programming may be affected by the outcome of global tensions.

## The Fiscal Situation and Financial Imperatives

The performance of the Canadian economy is on solid ground, with virtually every economic and fiscal indicator having vastly improved in the last several years. Budget 2003 takes advantage of this outstanding performance to restore and reinvest in public services in Canada, and, at the same time, places increased emphasis on fiscal discipline and sound program management across Government. New measures announced in Budget 2003 promoting expenditure reallocation and efficiency improvements will have an impact on our capacity to pursue new initiatives. We will need to continue to make choices about how best to deliver on our core mandate and to advance new policy and program priorities to meet our clients' evolving needs. The financial capacity of the department to respond to emerging issues and pressures, and our flexibility to internally reallocate resources to meet changing needs, will influence our plans and activities.

## Citizen Expectations and Public Support

VAC has a proud tradition of working with its stakeholders to identify and respond to client needs. A solid understanding of, and appreciation for, the priorities and perspectives of our stakeholders, including major Veterans' organizations, service delivery partners, individual clients, and Canadians at large is critical to policy and program planning and the delivery of services. At the same time as VAC benefits from the wisdom and input from experienced and vocal advocates, planning efforts are influenced by a supportive and interested Canadian public. It is clear that

Veterans enjoy high levels of support and recognition among Canadians. Indeed, we have the enviable support of 84% of Canadians who believe that Canada should do more to honour those who have fought and died in the service of our nation<sup>2</sup>. The level of public support will continue to play a role in shaping the development and implementation of Departmental programs and services.

## Trends in Service Delivery

Rapid advancements in on-line delivery of information and services to Canadians has had a major impact on the delivery of government programs and services. Further improvements in multi-channel access and transformed service delivery networks, including horizontal service delivery across programs, departments, and jurisdictions, will further influence how government interacts with its clients.

VAC's client-centred service approach and our Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISDF) serve as the foundations for transforming our program delivery and benefits processing by allowing us to work in partnership with other federal and provincial departments, as well as municipal governments, to deliver services to common clients in a more integrated fashion. Partnerships are equally critical to the delivery of Remembrance programming. VAC's work with governmental and non-governmental organizations at the community, national and international level will continue to ensure that the message of Remembrance reaches a broad audience.

VAC's tradition of excellence in service delivery is reflected in the results of the National Client Satisfaction Survey (NCSS)<sup>3</sup>. Our overall level of client satisfaction of 87% reflects the high quality of service that is consistently delivered to VAC's family of clients by competent and compassionate employees. Although our future ability to attain an even higher overall rating of client satisfaction will be tempered by the high marks already achieved, the findings from the 2003 NCSS further assist VAC in identifying new opportunities for service improvement.

VAC's strong support for and participation in Government-wide initiatives such as Government On-Line, Human Resources Management Reform, and Modernizing Comptrollership, will assist the Government in realizing key commitments made to Canadians. VAC recognizes that the time and effort its staff devote to these important initiatives have an operational impact on our capacity to do more in other areas.

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos-Reid Poll, November 2002

<sup>3</sup> Results based on the NCSS conducted in May 2003.

## Innovative Staff and a Vibrant Organization

The commitment of VAC's staff to service, learning, and innovation will continue to influence our approach to program and service delivery. VAC's strategic planning efforts recognize the integral role played by employees, not simply in sustaining current operations, but in improving service delivery and shaping our future.

The total number of disability pension applications received by VAC continues to increase. The approximately 29,000 first applications received in 2002-03 represents a two-fold increase since 1999. At the same time, there are growing demands placed on VAC staff as they respond to the increasingly complex health care needs of elderly Veterans, confront the challenges presented by operational stress and transition needs of CF Veterans, and take on new responsibilities for RCMP clients.

Against this backdrop of significantly increased workload, VAC has achieved major performance gains; for example, by reducing the turn-around times for the adjudication of first applications in the disability pension program to less than six months. Looking ahead, the emergence of new pressures and challenges will have an impact on the extent to which VAC can keep pace with a growing and increasingly complex workload and achieve even greater efficiencies.

Maintaining VAC's reputation for client service excellence in an environment of change and limited resources will require continued innovation in the delivery of our services and programs. Of perhaps even greater importance will be VAC's ongoing efforts to ensure that employees are well supported by a values-based organization that promotes workplace well-being, embraces diversity, and presents opportunities for continuous learning.

Recognizing also that a good balance between work and personal life is very important, not only for the individual but for the well-being of the organization as a whole, VAC is committed to the organization's development as a workplace of choice. It is by pairing qualified and dedicated individuals with a positive working environment that VAC will continue to thrive as a vibrant, learning organization.

## THE VETERAN POPULATION AND THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

A solid understanding of the almost 800,000 Veterans and other eligible clients for which our Department exists to serve is paramount to delivering on our mandate and achieving our vision.

The term “Veteran” includes Canada’s war service Veterans - the men and women who served during the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War - and also encompasses former Canadian Forces members in recognition of their service to Canada, for example, in international peace-keeping missions and other modern day operations.

Veterans Affairs’ family of clients also extends beyond Veterans, to include still-serving CF members, past and present members of the RCMP, their survivors and dependents, as well as certain allied Veterans and eligible civilians. On a broader scale, the citizens of Canada are also our clients. VAC’s Canada Remembers Program, in its endeavours to keep alive the achievements and sacrifices made by those who served Canada in times of war and peace, reaches out to Canadians and their communities both nationally and internationally. This includes youth, educators, and indeed all Canadians who enjoy the heritage of freedom that is the legacy of those who served our country in times of war and peace.



It is estimated that, as of April 2003, the number of living war service Veterans totalled 309,000<sup>4</sup>. The total number of CF (Regular Forces - released) Veterans, for the same time frame, is estimated at 300,000. In addition, there are some 60,000 CF (Regular Forces - still-serving), 111,000 CF (Reserves - released) and 22,000 CF (Reserves - still-serving). Taken together, these numbers provide a snap shot of the total estimated population of almost 800,000 Veterans and serving members of the CF Regular Force and Reserves living as of April 2003.

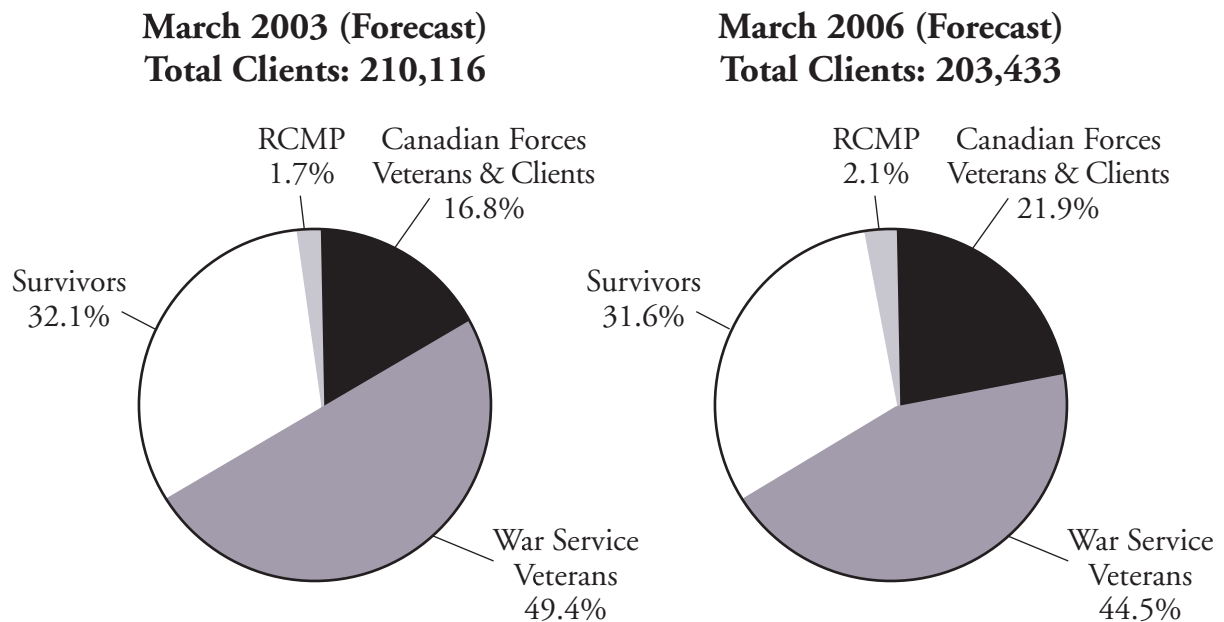
Fortunately, only a portion of Canada's Veterans become clients of VAC. VAC's disability pension and economic support programs and related treatment and health care services are designed to meet the needs of Veterans who suffer from a service-related injury or are income qualified. Indeed, of the estimated 309,000 war service Veterans, less than a third are VAC clients. With respect to CF Veterans, only about 6% are receiving benefits from the Department.

For the purpose of the following analyses, the client population includes only those in actual receipt of a service or benefit. However, it is important to note that VAC's dedication to service excellence, combined with the approach engendered by the Integrated Service Delivery Framework, means that VAC's front-line staff respond not only to the needs of clients in receipt of benefits, but also frequently interact with other individuals, who may or may not become future clients, some of whom may have applications in process. For instance, staff often provide information, advice and guidance to individuals over the telephone, whether they are family members, care givers, or friends of clients, potential future clients, or simply members of the public. Similarly, face-to-face interactions frequently take place with people who visit one of our regional and district offices located across the country. In some cases, these may be individuals who approach VAC for screening and/or information to assist in a determination of their eligibility for VAC programs or services. In other cases, they may simply be seeking general information about the department. Although not captured in official "client" statistics, VAC strives to serve all individuals who approach the department with the level of respect and professionalism deserved by all Canadians.

<sup>4</sup> The client forecasts presented on in UPDATE 2003 are based on data available as of April 1, 2003

## CLIENT POPULATION FORECASTS

Overall, it is expected that between March 2003 and March 2006, the number of clients<sup>5</sup> served by VAC will decline by only 3.2%, from 210,116 to 203,433. Although the total number of clients will not be dramatically reduced over this time period, it is evident that the demographic trends shaping the composition of VAC's client population will continue to evolve and change. The most notable change will be a 13% drop in the number of war service clients and a 26% rise in the number of CF clients.



Source: VAC Statistical Directorate, April 1, 2003

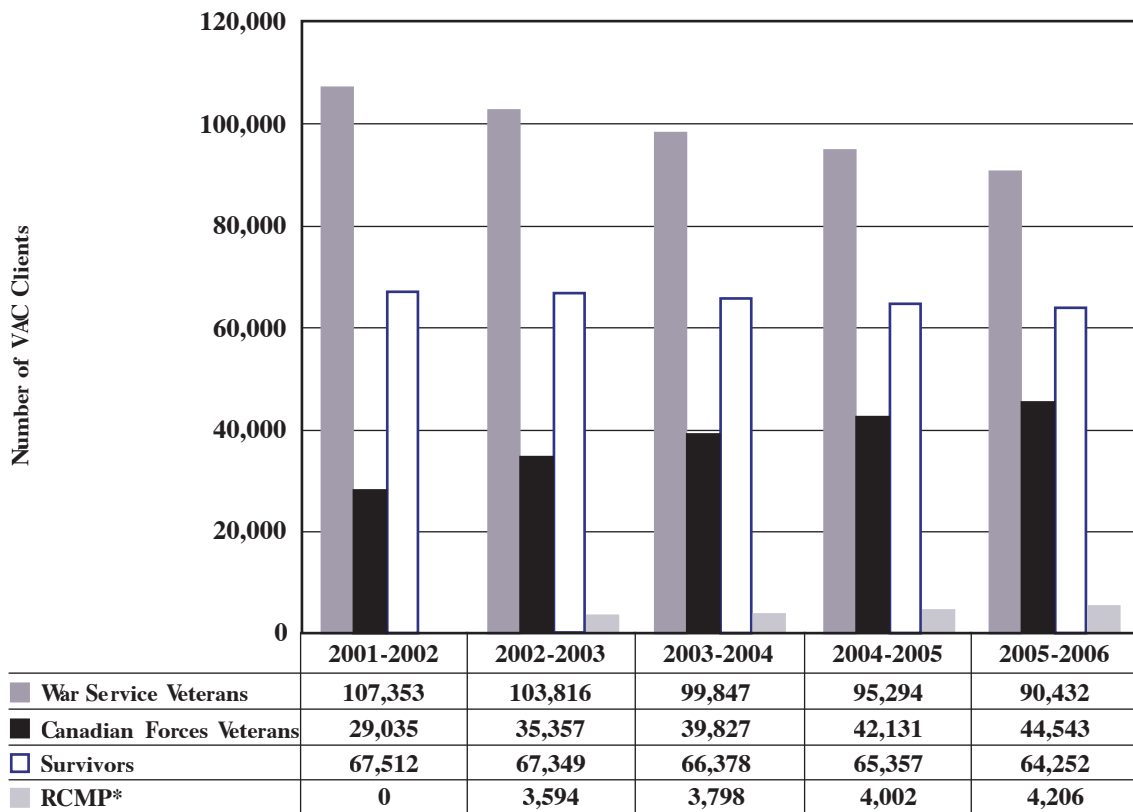
A closer look at the numbers reveals that the percentage of war service Veterans is projected to decrease from 49% to 44% of the total client population, while the percentage of Canadian Forces Veterans and clients is projected to increase from 17% to 22% of the client population over the same time period. The percentage of the client population represented by survivors is projected to decrease only slightly from 32% to 31.6%, while the percentage of RCMP clients is projected to experience a gradual increase from 1.7% to 2.1%. The forecasted increase in RCMP clients reflects the fact that VAC is now responsible for RCMP pension payment and treatment benefit administration, thereby bringing growing numbers of retired and still-serving RCMP members into our family of clients.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of clients in this context refers to individuals in actual receipt of a service or benefit.

As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the shifts in our client demographics over the full five years of the Strategic Plan are not expected to be dramatic. Indeed, longer-term projections reflected in Figure 2 suggest that, contrary to a common perception of a rapidly-dwindling client base, the decline in client numbers is expected to be more gradual.

**Figure 1:**

**Forecast of VAC Clients by ClientGroup  
(2001-2002 to 2005-2006)**

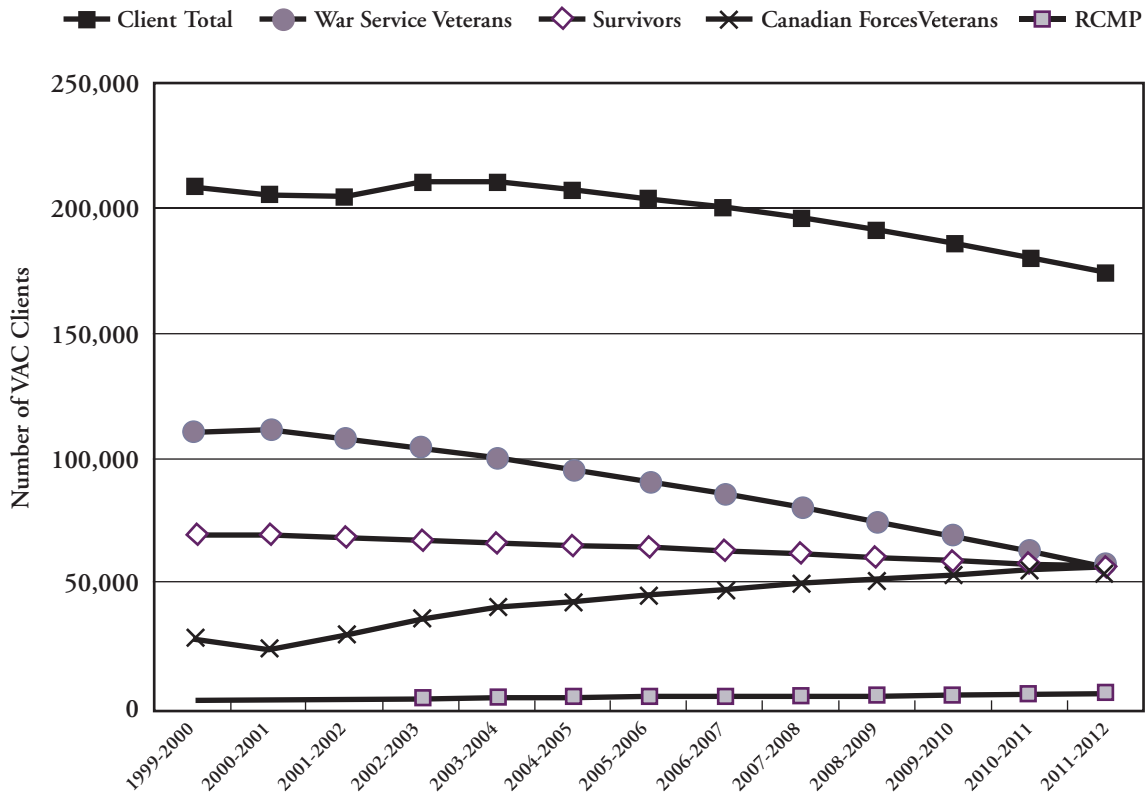


\* No figures for the number of RCMP clients are available for the 2001-2002 fiscal year.



Figure 2:

### Demographic Trends of VAC Clients (1999-2000 to 2011-2012)



Behind the categories and numbers of clients are the real people that VAC serves - individuals with diverse, increasingly complex, and sometimes urgent needs. Their sacrifices and achievements in the name of world peace remain powerful drivers behind VAC's enduring commitment to serve Veterans and other clients as they have served us.

UPDATE 2003 outlines how VAC is taking steps to adjust our policies and programs to better meet the evolving needs of our clients, whether that means ensuring that appropriate supports and health care is in place for our older war service Veterans, assisting younger CF Veterans and their families in making the transition from military to civilian life, or in commemorating the role played by Canada's Veterans in the pursuit of world peace and security.

## OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Our efforts will continue to be guided by our longer-term Departmental vision, which is premised on maintaining our focus on core business with an expanded clientele. As such, VAC's strategic direction over the next three years will be focused on continued service excellence to our war service Veterans, improvement of our services to Canadian Forces Veterans and still serving members, and increased partnerships to serve our RCMP clients. Continuing to instill a strong appreciation among Canadians for the sacrifices made by Veterans and others who serve our nation is an integral part of this strategic direction.

The precedence of our traditional Veterans - the brave men and women who responded to their country's call for service during the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War - deserves special mention. Without doubt, Canada's development as an independent country with a unique identity and recognized standing as a leading and responsible member of the community of nations stems in great measure from the magnitude of the achievements of Veterans who served a nation-in-arms during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The compensation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs and benefits instituted to address the needs of returning soldiers in the last century serve as the foundation for the Department's existence today. As the nature of Canadian military service has changed and the passage of time has led to shifts in the nature and needs of our client base, VAC has evolved, too.

Today, VAC is well-positioned to address the needs of elderly war service Veterans whose advancing age and deteriorating health often intensify their health care needs. This is not to say that our work with and for this special group of Veterans has been complete. To the contrary, VAC will continue to work with clients and stakeholders to ensure access to a comprehensive range of programs and services to respond appropriately to the complex and often urgent needs of aging Veterans, their survivors and caregivers. In addition, we will continue to monitor Veterans' satisfaction with service and program delivery and to identify their expectations and priorities for service improvement.

While the Department's proud tradition of evolving to meet to the emerging needs of war service Veterans has led to the development of a solid program base for this client group, VAC's repertoire of benefits and services to meet the current and future needs of younger clients with different military experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is less well developed. This is further evidenced in the 2003 National Client Survey which revealed that only 69% of Canadian Forces Veterans and clients determined that the programs and services offered by VAC meet their needs either entirely or for the most part. This compares to 81% of war service Veterans who indicated that our programs and services meet their needs to the same extent.

It is with this in mind that our strategic priorities for the coming years focus on building a modernized system of programs and services for other client groups, such as members and former members of the Canadian Forces and their families, the RCMP and eligible civilians.

Notwithstanding the additional emphasis placed on newer client groups, the Department is unwavering in the importance we assign to supporting the financial, physical and social health and well-being of war service Veterans and their survivors. Our long-standing record of innovation in responding to the changing needs of all our Veterans bodes well for moving forward in the future.



## OUR PRIORITIES

In keeping with our strategic direction, our priorities for the coming years have been adjusted to respond to emerging issues and reflect the need to focus our efforts on areas that require further consideration and development. Without doubt, it is the past and present contributions of our war service Veterans that have given us the freedom to look to the future. It is with this in mind that we will continue to ensure appropriate and compassionate responses to our aging War Veterans while we move forward in new directions to meet emerging needs.

VAC's eight priorities continue to be grouped under the original two strategic objectives: *Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement* and *Organizational Effectiveness*.

This reflects VAC's ongoing commitment to direct attention and resources to ensure the integrity and sustainability of our core disability pension, health care, compensation and remembrance programs while, at the same time, striving for continued improvements in the services offered to Veterans and other clients. The results of our biennial National Client Satisfaction Surveys, first conducted in June 2001 and repeated in April 2003, will be a valuable tool in measuring our progress and identifying future areas for service improvement.

At the same time, in order to continue to function as an effective public service organization, we must continue to pay attention to the systems, tools, and capacities that contribute to our organizational performance. It means making sure that we have the right people and infrastructure in place to allow us to work smarter and to achieve better results. With this in mind, VAC's second strategic objective of "*Organizational Effectiveness*" encompasses the collective efforts of staff and management to ensure that VAC functions as effectively and efficiently as possible, continues to be guided by values and principles, promotes the well-being of employees, and recognizes and respects the unique contributions of all staff and managers to our long-standing reputation for service excellence.

## **Strategic Objective 1: Integrity of Our Programs and Service Improvement**

The five priorities identified under this strategic objective include:

- Transforming service delivery and promoting innovation in policies and practices
- Improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces Veterans and still-serving members
- Partnering to serve the RCMP and eligible civilians
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the disability pension process and its flexibility to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of our Veterans and other clients
- Providing strong leadership in Remembrance programming through effective partnerships

## **Strategic Objective 2: Organizational Effectiveness**

The three priorities identified under this strategic objective include:

- Aligning our strategic human resources plan to support the goals of the organization and aspirations of our people
- Advancing the development of our information management & information technology capacity in support of service improvement, organizational effectiveness and Government-On-Line
- Enhancing our policy capacity to ensure more effective use of information and analysis in support of evidence-based decision-making and better public accountability

### *Transforming service delivery and promoting innovation in policies and practices*

- ADM, Veterans Services

VAC has a proud tradition of evolving its programs and services to meet the changing needs of Veterans and other clients. As an organization, we have embraced the tremendous challenge of meeting the diverse needs of our clients and their families and continue to consider stakeholder priorities and perspectives in our program development and service delivery.

VAC's client-centred approach to service delivery means that *individual* client needs are identified and unique plans are developed to address unmet needs, using internal resources or a combination of Departmental and community resources. The Department is now taking the concept of client-centred service to the next level through the Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISDF). This Framework builds upon the very best of what we have done in the past so that we can deliver exemplary client-centred service in the future - allowing clients and their families to achieve optimal functioning and independence in the community where health, social needs and legal entitlements are met. It will support staff in ensuring that the needs of Veterans and their families are met.

The ISDF links a number of related VAC initiatives directed at achieving service excellence, and will enhance VAC's ability to monitor client care through pro-active screening and an interdisciplinary approach to case management. A key element of this approach is that VAC does not have to be the sole service provider, but will work in the community to identify where service can best be found. Clients will benefit by receiving more consistent services across the country.

During the next three years, VAC will implement various initiatives to streamline operations and service delivery, including the creation of a National Contact Centre Network (NCCN) to respond to information requests and service needs of clients according to approved national service standards, as well as establishing a French-

language adjudication satellite and a foreign countries centre of expertise. The new Treatment Authorization Centres (TAC) will handle provider inquiry and authorization, client reimbursement, redirect and referral services and will have access to health professional services.

The ISDF will better support staff in their efforts to provide exemplary client centred service and provide a framework for managing our responses to the evolving needs of our clients and their families.

*Improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces Veterans  
and still-serving members*

*- ADM, Veterans Services*

VAC takes to heart its responsibility for the men and women who have, in many cases, sacrificed their own well-being in the service of our country and in the name of peace. Over the next three years, VAC will increase efforts to better understand and to respond to the needs and concerns of Canadian Forces clients and their families through improved and expanded programs and services, delivered with the support of an extensive network of partners. Measures taken will ensure that members or former members of the Canadian Forces who are suffering from a service-related disability receive all the disability pension and health care benefits to which they are entitled.

In close cooperation with DND, VAC has made significant progress with respect to the development of new initiatives that respond to the unique needs of CF Veterans, standard transition services, interdepartmental/intergovernmental collaboration and harmonization, and a modernized Canadian Forces program. Efforts to increase the awareness of CF members of VAC programs, benefits and services, through enhanced communications, pre- and post-deployment briefings of Regular Force members and Reservists, and an ongoing VAC presence at seventeen CF locations across Canada, are proving successful. Similarly, the launch of our Centres of Excellence Strategy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Operational Stress Injuries (OSI) is helping to improve CF members' and Veterans' access to assessment and treatment for PTSD and other psychological injuries resulting from military service. It appears that our efforts in this area have been recognized in that the overall client satisfaction rate has moved from 72% in 2001 to 80% in 2003.

We recognize, however, that more needs to be done to meet the current and future needs of this important and growing segment of our client population. Indeed, CF Veterans and still-serving members are projected to increase from about 17% of our client base in March 2003 to 22% by March 2006. Longer-term forecasts reveal that by 2010, CF clients could represent almost 30% of VAC's total client population. It is also important to note that, given legislative changes which extend benefits and services to still-serving CF members, VAC's future client population is likely to comprise a greater number of younger disabled CF clients.

Recognizing the challenges ahead and building on the success of our efforts to date, VAC continues to position itself to respond to the needs of CF Veterans, still-serving members and their families. The complexity of these needs requires an interdisciplinary approach with the support of an extensive network of partners. VAC's efforts over the next three years will ensure that CF clients have access to the appropriate range of needed services and benefits to effectively respond to their health needs (physical, mental, emotional and social) and to assist them with reintegration in civilian life.

Over the past 10 years, roughly 15% of the military releases have been for medical reasons and because many released members are relatively young, they are likely to pursue a civilian career. VAC will focus on assisting these clients in making the transition from military to civilian life through direct services and new working relationships with various experts in rehabilitation and reintegration, other partners and community resources. Our efforts will evolve based on research and practical experience, leading to the development of a rehabilitation policy framework and possible policy enhancements.



VAC will continue to work with the VAC-CF Advisory Council to develop and implement strategies to address a broad range of needs, some of which relate to environmental illness, traditional and non-traditional medical options, disability management, and support in the areas of income, long-term disability insurance, mental and family health.



The education, promotion, and staff awareness of the needs and issues facing CF clients is a priority for all VAC staff. Educational tools and learning opportunities will continue to be put in place to promote a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges facing CF members and to allow staff to update their knowledge and skills in dealing with complex issues, including mental health conditions. Work also continues on increasing the community's knowledge and awareness of operational stress injuries as well as improving research in the areas of prevention, management, and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and other operational stress injuries.

Canada Remembers, in ensuring it meets its commitment to the Remembrance needs of the CF, is creating a seventh Book of Remembrance, tentatively entitled "In the Service of Peace", to be installed in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill by November 2004. This Book of Remembrance is being created to recognize those who have given their lives serving Canada in areas of conflict other than the South African War, First World War, Second World War, and the Korean War.

***Partnering to serve the RCMP and eligible civilians - ADM, Veterans Services***

Building on a well-established relationship with the RCMP in disability pension adjudication, VAC is extending its partnership with the RCMP in new directions. Given VAC's recognized expertise as a leader in managing disability pensions and health care, we will continue to explore new and innovative approaches to serve RCMP clients in the coming years.

VAC has been providing disability pension adjudication services to the RCMP since 1948, and counselling services since 1989. Over the past five years, the needs of RCMP disability pensioners have become more complex due to the increasing number of still-serving members applying for disability pensions, the RCMP's greater role in peacekeeping missions and the "war on terrorism", and the need to provide effective health care programs for aging RCMP retired members who are in receipt of a disability pension. The RCMP has recognized VAC as a leader in the delivery of client-centred disability management programs, health care programs and programs for the elderly and VAC has recognized the need to make explicit the priority assigned to its partnership with the RCMP in the UPDATE 2003 of VAC's *Five-Year Strategic Plan*.

The increase in the number of RCMP disability pensioners and the increasing complexity of the needs of aging pensioners resulted in the January 2001 decision to transfer the administration of health care benefits from the RCMP to Veterans Affairs Canada. In December 2002, VAC assumed full responsibility for disability pension administration for an estimated 4,000 RCMP regular and civilian member pensioners. In addition, VAC is providing administration of pension-related health care benefits for retired RCMP regular pensioners and civilian RCMP pensioners (both still-serving and retired). Changes have been made to our information technology system, the Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN), and related business processes to enable the generation of disability pension payments directly to RCMP members in the same manner we process other VAC client payments.

Through the Federal Health Claims Processing System (FHCPS) contract with Atlantic Blue Cross Care, a health care delivery system similar to that currently available to war service Veterans and Canadian Forces Veterans is now being provided to RCMP clients who are pensioned for service-related injuries and illnesses.

Research undertaken in collaboration with the RCMP as part of the Transition Needs Analysis reveals that, as we have seen happen with our aging war service Veteran population, aging RCMP disability pensioners require a greater continuum of care as the combined effects of their pensioned disability and the chronic conditions associated with aging make it difficult to function in their homes and communities. Also, many still-serving or discharging RCMP members experience similar social, physical and psychological problems as those experienced by Canadian Forces Veterans.

In moving forward over the next three years, VAC will work closely with RCMP partners to address the particular transition needs of discharging RCMP members and determine what adjustments may be required to legislation, health care policies and programs, and service delivery mechanisms to ensure appropriate access to VAC programs and services, including VAC's Veterans Independence Program case management and long-term care for RCMP clients.

*Evaluating the effectiveness of the disability pension process and its flexibility to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of our Veterans and other clients*

*- ADM, Veterans Services*

The Disability Pension Program provides pensions and other benefits for service-related death and disability to war service Veterans, released and still serving members of the Canadian Forces, retired and still serving RCMP members, certain civilians as well as survivors and dependents.

In order to better respond to clients' emerging and changing needs, VAC is evaluating the disability pension process to assess its effectiveness and determine the extent of flexibility that exists in the program, organization and legislative framework to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of Veterans and other clients.

While the program's aging war service Veterans are decreasing in number, their needs are becoming increasingly complex. At the same time, the number of Canadian Forces clients is increasing, and their needs are very different from those of war service Veterans. All of this points to a requirement for the program to adapt to changing needs and be prepared to respond effectively, now and in the future, to a highly diverse clientele.

VAC has already made some progress in addressing future needs by providing on-line access to the Table of Disabilities and Entitlement Guidelines. As well, the Department is ready to accept on-line submission of health assessment data pending the implementation of Treasury Board's Secure Channel.

The evaluation will explore key issues relating to the evolution of client needs, the impact of the program on meeting clients' needs and expectations, and the appropriateness of the pension program as a gateway to other benefits and services. The findings from the evaluation will be critical in assessing the future direction of the program, including opportunities for partnerships and streamlining the process.

*Providing strong leadership in Remembrance programming through effective partnerships*  
*- Executive Director, Public Affairs*

As Canadians, we have been handed a rich legacy of peace, freedom and identity and it is now up to us to preserve and pass this legacy on to future generations. With the funding provided in Budget 2003, VAC will move forward with its efforts in partnership with a variety of organizations in the public, private and voluntary sector, to provide strong leadership in Remembrance programming that reflects the historical and contemporary role of Canada's military in protecting the values of our society.

A dramatic increase has occurred in Canadians' interest in military history and heritage, as well as in commemorative-based activities and the need to remember the sacrifices and achievements of our country's Veterans and peacekeepers. Many of Canada's Veterans are becoming less and less able to pass along the historical treasure that is locked within their memories and if we do not act quickly to capture it in some way it will be lost to our country forever. Today's youth have, in recent years, shown an appetite to learn more about Canada's rich military past and the Veteran community is eager to have their stories told to ensure that their legacy lives on in future generations of Canadians. The repatriation and the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier marked a turning point in altering Canadians' perspectives on remembrance and commemoration. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and Canada's involvement in ongoing military operations around the world will continue to contribute to expectations for a high level of recognition and Remembrance.

As an organization, we have embraced our responsibility for playing a leadership role in the implementation of the 2001 Government of Canada Remembrance policy to ensure that the sacrifices made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as those of today's Canadian Forces and RCMP, continue to be remembered and actively honoured by Canadians. While guided by this policy, our programming efforts over the next three years will be influenced by two compelling realities: (1) the need to react to a declining war service Veteran population by ensuring that youth are positioned to "take up the torch" and carry forward the legacy of Veterans' sacrifices and achievements; and (2) the need to ensure that the selfless role played by those who serve in peacekeeping missions and modern day military operations are appropriately recognized and honoured.

Engaging and educating Canadians, especially youth, within their communities and in other learning venues, will continue to be the primary focus in delivering the Canada Remembers program. Learning initiatives, targeted primarily at youth, will be designed to enhance the understanding of the causes and consequences of war and the relevance to our lives today in a free and peaceful nation. Similarly, the development and delivery of innovative and exciting learning tools and activities for Canada's youth, sometimes in partnership with like-minded groups and organizations and with a variety of different learning strategies and platforms, will support our efforts to increase public awareness and knowledge. New opportunities for on-line services will be explored, complementing web-based activities, such as interactive learning exhibits, virtual tours, and other ways that allow Veterans to share their stories and experiences with the youth of today.

Reaching out to Canadians in their communities will also help to support an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the members of today's Canadian Forces and the effects of their countless experiences on their families at home.

2003 signifies an important year of Remembrance for Canadians: the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic; the official opening of the Juno Beach Centre; the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War, and the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First World War Armistice. In 2004, June 6<sup>th</sup> will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, the Allied invasion of German-occupied France that led to the end of the Second World War. A key component of VAC's Remembrance programming over the next three years will be to ensure that historical moments are appropriately commemorated.

The remaining three years of the Strategic Plan will also see the completion of the Canadian Battlefield Memorials Restoration Project, a \$30 million initiative to restore the Canadian National Vimy Memorial Monument and twelve other Canadian First World War battlefield memorials in Europe. With activities taking place from June 2001 through to July 2006, these memorials and sites will be refurbished to ensure the health and safety of both the public and employees, and to preserve and safeguard the dignity and integrity of these sites.

***Aligning our strategic human resources plan to support the goals of the organization and aspirations of our people*** - ADM, Corporate Services

VAC's Human Resources Strategic Plan 2002-2007<sup>6</sup> was launched in November 2002 and will serve as a framework for the strategic management of human resources over the next five years. As such, the plan provides a foundation for ensuring that, as an organization, we have the right people in the right place at the right time to uphold our pledge of quality service to clients.

Critical issues facing VAC in the area of human resource planning include staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities, the need for greater diversity in the workplace, and assistance for employees in managing stress and balancing workloads. Recognizing the challenges and opportunities posed by these issues, the HR Strategic Plan identifies three priorities that will guide Departmental efforts in the coming years: 1) recruitment and human resource allocation in support of Departmental operational priorities; 2) creating a learning organization; and 3) modernization of human resources management.

Action plans will be put in place to guide the development and implementation of key initiatives to help us achieve our priorities and to attain our over-arching strategic human resource objective "*to retain, recruit and develop motivated VAC staff sufficient to support the integrity of Departmental programs, improve services and ensure organizational effectiveness*". To accomplish this requires that programs be adequately resourced with people having the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities. This, in turn, assumes workplace well-being, inclusive of continuous learning, professional fulfilment, opportunity for advancement and a balance between work life and private life.

As a tangible demonstration of our commitment to our people, several initiatives have been put in place to address workplace well-being issues and employee concerns. These include the creation of the Employee Council and the Workplace of Choice Committee, plus the work spearheaded by the Champion of Pride and Recognition, together with an increased emphasis on creating a learning organization.

<sup>6</sup> VAC's Human Resources Strategic Plan is available on-line at [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca)

The importance of people issues as a means to achieving a well-functioning organization is recognized by VAC. While significant progress has been made, further action is necessary to advance our HR agenda. We will continue to build our HR capacity and pursue reforms that will position VAC to respond to emerging challenges and new realities in the areas of official languages, employment equity, career development, values and ethics, classification, managing stress and balancing workloads.

The results of the 2002 Public Service Employee Survey and the introduction of legislation, in February 2003, to modernize human resources management in the federal Public Service provide further impetus and support for Departmental efforts to equip staff to adapt to the changing needs of Canadians. We are confident that improved human resources management will make VAC a better place to work and build a career, while continuing to provide quality services to our clients.



*Advancing the development of our information management & information technology capacity in support of service improvement, organizational effectiveness and Government On-Line*

*- ADM, Corporate Services*

Rapid changes in the domain of information management and information technology entail significant investments in time and resources and represent a major challenge for all federal Departments. At the same time, IT is a powerful tool that can enrich the ways in which Canadians interact and communicate with government and access programs and services.

Recognizing the critical role of IM/IT in facilitating organizational effectiveness and the linkages to Government On-line and service delivery, this priority has been moved from the *Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement* strategic objective to the *Organizational Effectiveness* strategic objective. This change reflects the importance of enhancing our IM/IT capacity in order to continue to support effective and efficient delivery of services. A solid IT capacity will allow VAC to continue to pursue service excellence.

The Benefits & Health Services On-Line (B&HSOL) Project is one component of the Government On-Line (GOL) Initiative. This multi-year project will provide VAC clients and their caregivers with the ability to interact with the Department on-line, through the use of secure Internet technology. VAC clients will be able to send and receive relevant information, acquire access to programs and services, and do business electronically with Veterans Affairs, further enhancing our Client-Centred Service Approach and Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISDF). The Table of Disabilities and the Entitlement Guidelines are presently accessible on-line. Clients will soon have the opportunity to submit disability pension applications for new entitlements or a review of existing benefits when the Secure Channel for Canadian citizens becomes available later in 2003. Clients and their service providers will also be able to submit health assessment data on-line. In offering these on-line services, however, the Department also will continue to offer services by telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings.

VAC is also leading the development of Seniors Canada On-line (SCOL) in partnership with other federal, provincial and territorial departments and agencies that provide services to seniors. As a major GOL initiative, the purpose of Seniors Canada On-line is to provide a single access point to a variety of services and sources of information residing on the Internet to seniors, their families their caregivers and supporting organizations. VAC will continue to move forward with its partners in the further development and implementation of SCOL.

The reality is that investments in IT are costly. The industry predicts that the cost of IT support will soon be second only to salary in terms of overall expenditures by organizations. Increasingly, VAC needs to ensure that IT investments are business driven and not technology driven. Key issues facing the Department over the next three years include the extent to which additional IT investments should be made “in-house” or outsourced, where economies of scale can be realized by partnering with other federal



departments, and how best to achieve recapitalization of equipment that provides the best value-for-money.

To this end, an Information and Technology Services Strategic Plan is being finalized. This Plan will support the strategic directions contained in the VAC Five-Year Strategic Plan, the departmental Service Improvement Plan and the Government-On-line initiative. It will emphasize investments and innovations that offer significant value-for-money, while advancing the development of our information technology capacity. It will also deal with issues such as a long-term recapitalization plan and the development of an IT Human Resources Strategic Plan.

The Department will develop a separate VAC Information Management Strategy to support the implementation of a Department-wide information solution to position the Department for compliance with the new Government of Canada Information Management Policy.

*Enhancing our policy capacity to ensure more effective use of information and analysis in support of evidence-based decision-making and better public accountability*

*- DG, Corporate Planning, and DG, Policy Coordination  
and Ottawa Headquarters*

As the environment in which governments operate becomes more complex, there are increasing demands on policy research, analysis, development, implementation, and monitoring. Action taken on a number of fronts and from different parts of the organization is helping to strengthen the Department's policy and analytical capacities, increase our voice in national policy discussions, and move our policy agenda forward. Partnerships with external stakeholders, including federal colleagues, have been augmented as have our internal mechanisms for sharing information, identifying policy challenges and seizing opportunities for collaboration.

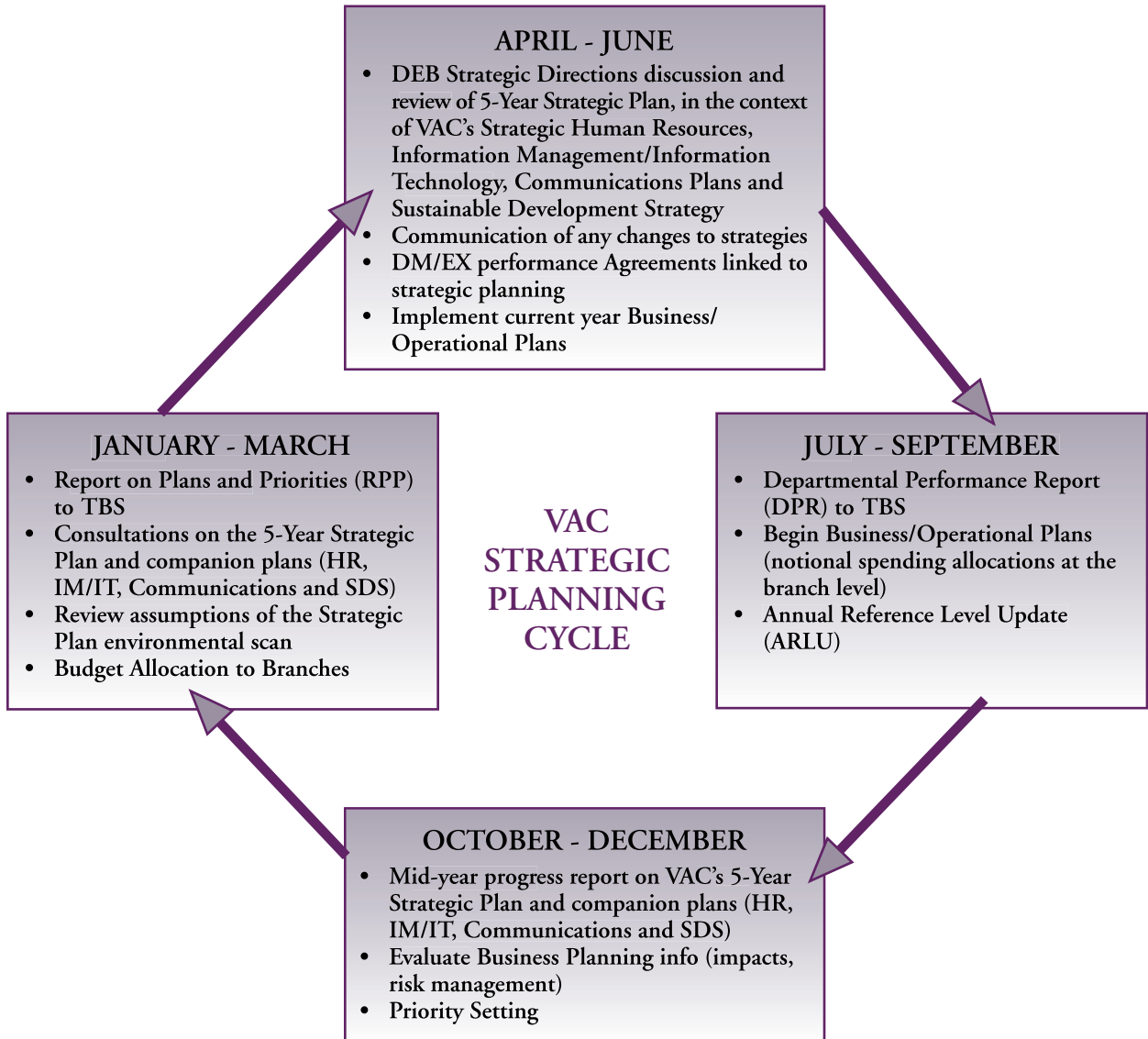
VAC recognizes that collaboration, coordination and partnerships are essential for advancing the Government's policy agenda, improving service delivery, and achieving results for Canadians. Given VAC's expertise and experience as a leader in the management of disability pensions and health care, the organization is well-positioned to contribute to interdepartmental and national policy efforts on a variety of fronts.

Over the next three years, VAC will continue to take steps to ensure we are involved in forums where federal, provincial/territorial and municipal colleagues may benefit from our experience in the delivery of health care services and disability benefits to Canada's Veterans. We will actively pursue opportunities to share best practices and lessons learned and thereby increase our collective knowledge. By lending our voice to discussions, we can help to shape the design of new programs and services to enhance the quality of life for seniors in areas such as healthy living, home care, palliative and end-of-life care, and measures to support the full participation of persons with disabilities in Canadian society.

Building on current efforts and progress to date, VAC will also continue to develop our internal capacities in the areas of policy research, analysis and development. We will pursue a more integrated approach to policy development within VAC and facilitate a deeper understanding of internal and external dimensions of policy development within Government.

# APPENDIX A

## VAC's Annual Planning and Reporting Cycle



## HOW TO CONTACT VAC

### Reader feedback

We would greatly appreciate your comments on UPDATE 2003.

We invite you to communicate your comments to the Corporate Planning Division at: [plan@vac-acc.gc.ca](mailto:plan@vac-acc.gc.ca) or the following address:

Director General  
Corporate Planning Division  
Veterans Affairs Canada  
66 Slater Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0P4

### General enquiries

Should you wish to make a general enquiry about VAC, its programs or services, please contact your nearest district or regional office. You can find their locations and telephone numbers in the government pages of your local telephone directory.

### VAC publications

VAC produces a variety of publications on its programs and services. Copies of all publications are available on our web site ([www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca)). They may also be obtained from our district and regional offices across Canada or from our Communications Division at the following address:

Communications Division  
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