



Veterans Affairs
Canada

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VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

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UPDATE 2002

Canada

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

The Government of Canada has made a promise to all Canadians to secure a better quality of life for its citizens. It is with pride that Veterans Affairs Canada plays a key role in delivering on this agenda by serving a unique family of clients: war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and still-serving members, survivors and dependents, and eligible civilians.

Year Two of the *Five-Year Strategic Plan* sets the stage for us to deliver on our nation's commitments to veterans and ensures that we are well positioned to move forward in coming years. In the broadest terms, our efforts will continue to focus on three main areas:

- Delivering programs and services to meet the ongoing quality of life, health, and long-term care needs of our war era veterans whose advancing years bring a unique set of demands;
- Serving the needs of Canadian Forces veterans who are increasingly in need of our assistance; and
- Keeping the flame of remembrance alive so that the sacrifices made in the 20th century, as well as those of today's Canadian Forces, continue to be remembered and celebrated by Canadian youth.

The annual review of the *Strategic Plan* confirmed that the department is on track and the overarching strategic priorities that serve as the foundation for our work remain intact.



Departmental priorities and activities have been realigned to take into account our accomplishments to date, the changing environment and, more importantly, the evolving and complex needs of our very special group of clients. Over the next four years, using this *Plan* as a guide, the Department will adapt programs, improve services, and provide the support necessary for our staff to meet the diverse and increasingly complex needs of those who serve us in war and peace.

The Department's reputation of dedication and service to Canada's veterans is well known. I am confident that, within the framework set out in this *Plan*, staff will continue to pursue excellence and innovation in program development and service delivery and will achieve results that are meaningful to Canadians, particularly to our veterans.

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

DEPUTY MINISTER'S MESSAGE

When Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) created its first ever Five-Year Strategic Plan in 2001, the Departmental Executive Board decided that the Plan should be reviewed and adjusted annually so that it would remain current, reflecting the evolving strategic environment within which VAC delivers its programs and services. The strategic environment during the past year has been marked by successes and new challenges.

Over the past twelve months, the dedication of our staff has been instrumental in notable accomplishments of which I will specifically mention just a few. Merchant Navy veterans have been compensated for their significant war time role. Most former members of Canada's Armed Forces are now recognized as "veterans" and our staff is working closely with the Department of National Defence officials to improve our understanding of and services to Canadian Forces personnel, active and retired. Discussions began with the National Round Table on First Nations Veterans' issues on the postwar reestablishment experience of First Nations veterans, with a view to try to find a fair and equitable resolution to longstanding grievances of First Nations veterans. Finally, Canadians have shown an increased awareness of the sacrifices of those who have served and still serve Canada at home and abroad in times of war or peace.

A significant factor contributing to this increased awareness was the terrorist attacks and aftermath of September 11, 2001. This tragedy certainly has challenged us both personally and professionally. But our committed employees have risen to the challenge, as they have throughout our Department's history. Whether they have been called upon by veterans experiencing emotional memory relapses triggered by the terror or by Canadian Forces personnel with questions and concerns prior to their deployment overseas, our employees have responded with compassion and professionalism that is the trademark of Veterans Affairs Canada.



Veterans, stakeholders and staff who are familiar with VAC's 2001 Five-Year Strategic Plan will recognize when reading the revised *Plan* that, despite the significance of the changes to our environment during the past year, our foremost objective remains constant. It is to achieve an overall improvement in the delivery of our health care and disability pension programs while maintaining our service excellence to war veterans, and strengthening services to Canadian Forces veterans. Our second objective, which also remains unchanged, is to enhance our organizational effectiveness through more strategic management of our staff, improved communications, expanded use of technologies and a greater contribution to national policy development in the areas directly related to the well-being of our veterans and other clients.

In all our endeavours, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to our employees to promote VAC as a learning organization, to foster workplace well-being, and to encourage work-life balance through formal and informal mechanisms and initiatives. Staff has clearly demonstrated that, with appropriate support, they can take action to move the markers in the right direction. There is no doubt that our collective efforts in this regard will position VAC as an employer of choice.

In reading this Strategic Plan, I am confident you will agree that the Department continues to make excellent progress toward the fulfilment of these two objectives.



Larry Murray
Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategic objectives and priorities which are outlined in this Plan will set a course to confirm the relevance of our Department, enhance the integrity of our programs and make for a vibrant, challenging workplace.

OUR GENERAL DIRECTION

Over the next four years, we will concentrate our energies on improving services to our current clients and on adapting our programs to meet changing and evolving needs. To accomplish this, VAC will need a full complement of trained and motivated staff, as well as appropriate program resources.

OUR PRIORITIES

The ten priorities which are outlined in this plan support two strategic objectives - **Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement** and **Organizational Effectiveness**. More importantly, they recognize the long-standing commitment and debt of gratitude to veterans. Our overriding priority is to continue to improve services to our veterans, while at the same time providing excellent services to our other clients.

Over the next four years, we will continue to give priority to:

- Improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces veterans.
- Achieving continued improvements in the delivery of our health care program through a client-centred service approach.
- Affirming our remembrance mandate and providing strong leadership in the implementation of the Government of Canada remembrance policy.
- Renovating Ste. Anne's Hospital and furthering its development as a centre of expertise in the care of the aged.

- Conducting a fundamental review of the disability pension process to address client concerns and bring about continued improvements.
- Advancing the development of our information technology capacity in support of service improvement and organizational effectiveness.
- Enhancing our strategic policy capacity in support of greater involvement in national policy issues.
- Strategic human resources planning to align human resources management with strategic objectives.
- Improving our communications capacity.
- Better integrating and coordinating its strategic, business, human resource, information management/information technology and sustainable development planning.

In working together to achieve these important elements of the Plan, our employees will be guided by our mission, vision and value statements.

1. OUR MANDATE

Canada's development as an independent country with a unique identity stems in no small measure from its achievements in times of war. A good part of our modern identity is associated with pride in Canada's enviable peacekeeping record. But Canada's contribution to global peace and security, both as an ally and peacekeeping partner, has come at a heavy price in terms of the lives sacrificed, health forfeited and hopes unfulfilled.

The Department exists to repay the nation's debt of gratitude toward those whose courageous efforts have given us this legacy, and have contributed to our growth as a nation.

Our mandate stems from laws and regulations. Among the more significant is the *Department of Veterans Affairs Act*, which charges the Minister of Veterans Affairs with the following responsibilities:

“ 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 ... ”

The Department meets its responsibilities through its various programs. Programs for disability pensions, veterans allowances, pension advocacy, health care and commemoration provide compensation for hardships arising from disabilities and lost economic opportunities, innovative health and social services, professional legal assistance and recognition of the achievements and sacrifices of Canadians during periods of war and peace, including peacekeeping operations.

We provide services to a highly diverse clientele which reflect the remarkable breadth of Canada's contributions to world peace. Our clients include:

- Armed Forces and Merchant Navy veterans who served during the First World War, Second World War or Korean War.
- Canadian Forces veterans, and in certain cases, current members of the Canadian Forces, including those who served in Special Duty Areas and in peacekeeping.
- Allied veterans who lived in Canada prior to periods of war.
- Certain civilians who are entitled to benefits because of their war time services.
- Former, and in certain cases, serving members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Survivors and dependents of the foregoing groups.

Veterans Affairs Canada also reaches out to all Canadians as well as the world community through our Canada Remembers Program, designed to honour and enhance the remembrance of all those who served Canada in the quest for peace.

In addition, we receive many inquiries from members of the public. We are proud to assist those who approach the Department with requests for information on our programs, services and activities.

2. OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Veterans Affairs Canada's Mission and Vision statements, along with a new statement of Values and Ethics, represent important parts of this strategic plan. The Mission statement explains why VAC exists and the Vision statement represents a shared image of our future and what we hope to achieve together over the five-year horizon and beyond. The Values and Ethics statement assists us in reflecting and shaping our organizational culture while guiding us in our decisions and actions.

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.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

KEY FACTORS WITHIN VAC'S ENVIRONMENT

To plan ahead with confidence, organizations have to be aware of important forces within their environment that can influence where they want to go in the future and how they get there. To help with our strategic planning, we conduct an annual assessment of the operating environment to identify factors that will influence the Department over the next few years.

The key factors listed below are those which our 2001 assessment and previous consultations have revealed will influence the 2001-2006 planning period.

Fiscal and financial health

An important planning consideration is the amount of federal or provincial government funding which will be made available to programs for veterans and other clients, and more generally, for Canadian seniors. This will impact on our ability to adapt our programs to changing client needs. It may also affect the quality of our client-centred case management approach, which integrates programs and services available inside and outside the Department.

Canada's fight against terrorism

The nature and size of Canada's contribution to the international campaign against terrorism will impact on the requirement for and efficient delivery of programs and services offered to the Canadian Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families. Canada's contribution may also influence the content and delivery of remembrance activities.

Medical advances

Emerging medical advances and their potential impact on human health could influence the type of health services which we will deliver in the future. One can foresee, for instance, that such advances could increase life expectancy for veterans and improve the state of their health.

Federal role and priorities

The federal government's prominent role in Canadian society, and how this role is expressed, could have an impact on some of our programs, including national commemoration activities and our potential contributions to the Canadian health sector. Policy choices with respect to greater or lesser involvement in seniors' issues will also influence the Department.

Trends in service delivery

Government involvement in making services available on-line and through remote access, world-wide trends in centralizing services and developments in client-centred approaches to health care delivery, will have an influence on the methods of service delivery over the next decade. These trends, both on their own and considered together, hold the promise of further improvements in service delivery and benefits processing.

Other factors

Other external factors such as the general aging of the Canadian population, globalization, potential international conflicts, possible changes in government organization and the overall state of the labour market will also influence our strategic planning. Although the extent and nature of the impacts are less certain, these factors also merit close attention in terms of how we operate most effectively at the outset of the 21st century.

4. IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR VAC

Over the summer of 2000, several discussion forums and interviews were organized to hear from our employees, subject experts, organizations representing various veterans' groups and other clients, business partners, and senior managers on key issues facing the Department. The issues which are highlighted below reflect their insights and the results of a 2001 assessment of our operating environment.

WHAT TYPES OF ISSUES WILL VAC FACE?

The consultations and assessment of our operating environment suggest that we will face four main issues over the next few years and in the present decade:

- **Appropriateness of benefits and services:** questions about the impact that the international campaign against terrorism will have on the nature of the benefits and services available to Canadian Forces members in the battle against terrorism;
- **Service delivery issues:** challenges with respect to how and to whom we will deliver programs and services;
- **Service support issues:** questions about the type of support and resources needed to deliver services; and
- **Contributing to the national agenda:** issues relating to how to position the Department to better contribute to national objectives.

APPROPRIATENESS OF BENEFITS AND SERVICES

Canada's involvement in the post-September 2001 international campaign against terrorism may bring into question the sufficiency of benefits and services designed in response to more traditional military conflicts where battle zones and special duty areas were easily defined. The unlimited geographic scope of terrorist attacks and anti-terrorism operations may create program and service discrepancies.

One such discrepancy may appear with regard to conditions of eligibility for certain VAC health and disability benefits. A current precondition of eligibility for some

benefits is service in a combat zone or special duty area. Historically, these geographic areas have been specific and confined. However, one may question whether Air Force personnel injured while servicing a CF-18 in support of patrols over Toronto or Montreal is any less deserving of health and disability benefits than navy personnel injured while on duty in the Arabian Sea. The unlimited geographic scope of terrorism and the campaign against it have blurred lines on maps that once clearly delineated regions of military risk from regions of peace.

S E R V I C E D E L I V E R Y I S S U E S

Veterans and other clients we serve

In recent years, there has been a common impression among Canadians, and even within the Public Service, that the number of clients is quickly diminishing and that the Department may soon disappear.

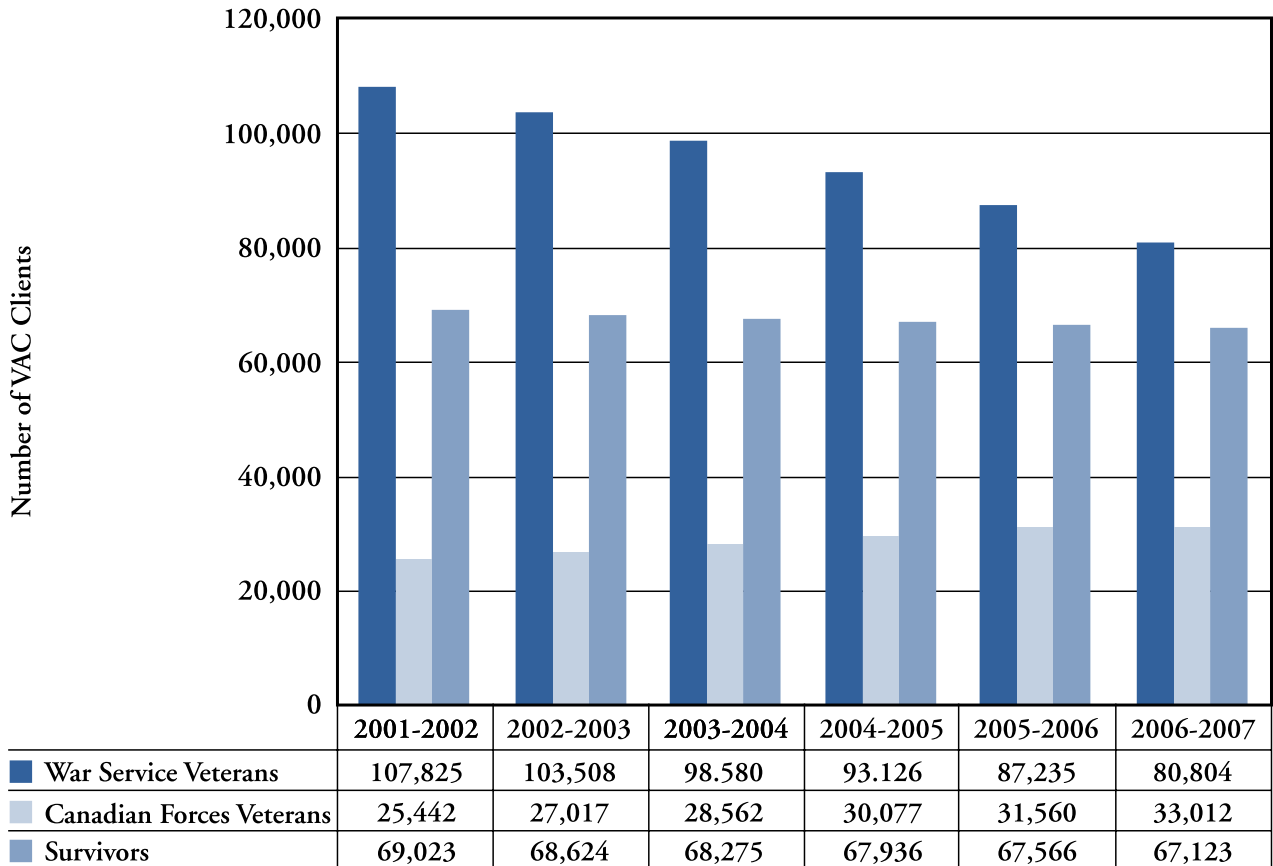
This perception is not based in fact. The number of veterans and other clients whom we serve will remain strong over the next eight to ten years and beyond. During this same time frame their age will make their care needs even more intensive than at present.

VAC's family of clients includes war veterans and Canadian Forces veterans. It also includes their eligible spouses and dependents. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, it is true that some of our clients will not be with us by 2007. War service veterans will decline by about 25%, from 107,800 to approximately 80,800. The size of other client groups, however, will remain relatively unchanged or experience an increase over the planning period. Family members of deceased eligible veterans and other clients, composed mostly of widows and dependent children, will remain in the range of 67,100 to 69,000. Eligible Canadian Forces veterans will actually increase by about 30%, from 25,400 to approximately 33,000.

Figure 1:

Forecast of VAC Clients by Client Group
(2001-2002 to 2006-2007)

October 22, 2001

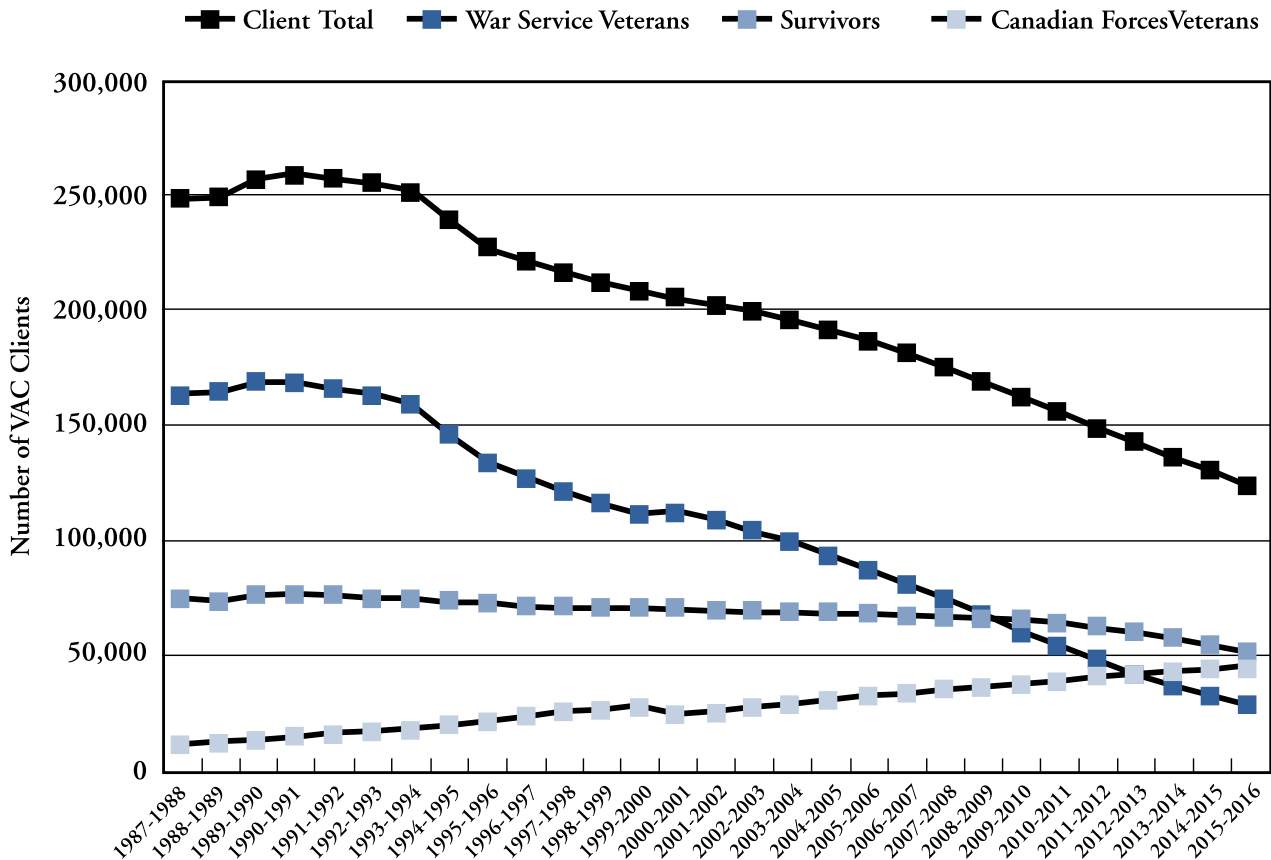


Taken together, these trends suggest that by the year 2007, our client base will have declined, by 10.6%, from 202,300 to a projected 180,900. By 2016, we will have approximately 123,400 clients to serve. By this time, war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and eligible surviving family members will have almost equal representation within VAC's clientele. (See Figure 2 .)

Figure 2:

Demographic Trends of VAC Clients
(1987-1988 to 2015-2016)

October 22, 2001



Apart from the clients who access benefits and services, it must not be forgotten that VAC also serves a much larger constituency through its Canada Remembers Program. This program honours the contributions and sacrifices by those who served Canada in times of war and peace. It endeavours to engage Canadians, particularly our youth, in acts of remembrance and related public education programs.

Given projected trends in client population, the main challenge over the next five years and beyond, will be to serve the diversified client groups, responding effectively to their different and evolving needs.

Adapting our models of service delivery

In the past, and until recently, many of our programs have run almost independently of each other. This situation was mainly a reflection of how programs came into being and the needs which they served at a particular place in time.

Today, many of our clients access several of our economic, disability pension and health-related programs, simply because their advanced years or personal situation result in a greater need. Therefore, it is more effective for us to structure our services around each person's comprehensive needs rather than along program lines. This is one of the pillars of our current client-centred service approach. Many client needs can be fulfilled within our full menu of programs or by programs or services found outside the Department. Over the next five years and into the longer term, we will be challenged to continually adapt our client-centred service approach to best meet the changing needs of both traditional war and Canadian Forces veterans, and their families.

The use of technology

Like many other federal departments, VAC strongly supports the use of technology to improve its services and communication with clients. In fact, information technology is already a large part of our operations. Our recent investment in a new Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) is one example of how information systems are being used to support a client-centred service approach. The next important step in the use of technology will be to offer veterans and other clients other service options which could make it easier to access our programs. In keeping with the government's national objective, we will make services available on the Internet. This will accommodate a growing demand by Canadians to use this tool to conduct business. In offering this optional service however, we will continue to offer traditional services by telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings.

Affirming our mandate

Our consultations have pointed out that we should place a greater priority on two long-standing components of our mandate: responsibility for Canadian Forces veterans and responsibility to the general Canadian public with respect to remembrance activities.

Both commitments require a strong reaffirmation if growing expectations and needs are to be met, especially in the face of Canada's involvement in the current campaign against international terrorism.

We have become more actively involved with Canadian Forces veterans in partnership with the DND. Together, the departments are exploring ways to improve the current services available to this important client group. We have an important role to play in delivering expanded services to assist with the Government's Quality of Life initiative for these Canadians.

Our remembrance activities have a tremendous potential to contribute in a positive way to a celebration of Canadian values and citizenship, and the education of Canadian youth. Building upon recent initiatives and partnerships to further acknowledge our clients' critical role in the defence of world peace, we are well-positioned to provide leadership in the development, coordination and delivery of national remembrance activities.

S E R V I C E S U P P O R T I S S U E S

Pressure on program resources

VAC prides itself on the face-to-face client contact it maintains through our district offices and home visits by our area counsellors and at Ste. Anne's Hospital. We are privileged to provide quality service to our clients and we remain true to our service philosophy of offering client-centred service and case management that meets as many client needs as is possible. Staff in our Regional Offices and our Headquarters in Charlottetown are equally proud of the role they play in support of this client-centred approach.

As our war veterans advance in age, the amount of personalized contact, they require from our staff increases. Personalized services are also needed by many Canadian Forces veterans to accommodate their special circumstances. Both of these emerging trends will place added pressure on our counsellors and district staff, who already carry heavy caseloads. In order to address these pressures, VAC will continue to ensure the allocation of finite resources to meet the most pressing needs and priorities.

Managing and looking after VAC staff

In accepting the challenging work that lies before us, over the next four years we will have to be very mindful of our most valuable resource - Veterans Affairs staff. Our employees face a decade that will feature changing programs and evolving client needs, the need to master new tasks, technologies and responsibilities, and turnovers in our workforce as many Public Servants retire. We will have to plan ahead to address the many human resource concerns that these changes generate. Particular attention will have to be paid to staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities for employees, assisting employees through periods of transition, ensuring greater diversity in the workplace and fostering effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. The Department will also have to focus energy and attention on advancing work on classification reform and ensuring adequate human resource capacity, to support its strategic objectives for human resources.

Communications issues

VAC has been a dynamic department, especially over the last 20 years. It has pioneered and implemented many innovative health care programs for veterans and other clients, improved its processes to award disability pensions and economic assistance, increased eligibility for many services and benefits, expanded the reach of its remembrance program and also invested in new technology and research to improve service quality. While these activities have produced very positive results, they have also put a great deal of strain on the Department's communications capacity. Each of these accomplishments has generated the need to consult and communicate with veterans, other clients, employees, the Canadian public and our partners. This trend will continue well into the present decade. As a result, we have begun to address gaps to meet our communication responsibilities. Key among these, is the ability to share program and other important information effectively with its clients.

CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

VAC's research and strategic policy capacity

People who are familiar with VAC's accomplishments in the fields of disability compensation, seniors' health, health care service delivery, and remembrance are often surprised that the Department is not more prominently mentioned or consulted during national policy discussions that touch on these topics. The main reason why we have not had a significant voice in some of these discussions in the past has been the strong focus on our clients. Today however, we recognize that we have an important contribution to make to the national policy discussion, and that our clients can also benefit from a greater sharing of information and ideas. To achieve the objective of making an important contribution to the national agenda, we must strengthen our research and strategic policy capacities. We will also assume a more active role in the National Capital and increase our involvement in interdepartmental policy forums.

VAC's remembrance mandate

Recent commemoration events like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier have demonstrated a growing realization among Canadians that our Canadian values, identity and development as a country owe much to fellow citizens who served in the world wars, subsequent military conflicts and peacekeeping operations. This kind of positive public support and its importance to our national unity compels us to reaffirm our remembrance mandate and find new ways of nurturing this recognition and unifying sentiment.

Results from a recent study of VAC's remembrance program overwhelmingly confirmed that Canadians believe it is vital to remember the contributions and sacrifices made by our veterans and peacekeepers, that remembrance is a Government of Canada responsibility and that strong government leadership is required with our Department assuming the leadership role.

VAC's experience in health care and disability compensation sectors

The attention of the Federal and Provincial Governments is increasingly turning to matters of health and better ways of coordinating and managing health care systems. As an active member of Canada's public health sector, we can make a valuable contribution to policy and program discussions, especially those relating to seniors' health and disability programs and benefits. The Department's history of research into veterans' health, its experience in program development and its long case history of providing disability benefits and direct long-term care at federal care institutions, makes us a valuable health care partner. Furthermore, as a result of our experience in the areas of case management and client-centred service delivery, we can contribute valuable insights to discussions in the areas of income and health policy.

5. OUR FUTURE DIRECTION

The next four years . . .

Over the next four years, we will have a very full slate of activities fulfilling our responsibilities to war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and other clients. As indicated earlier, our clients will continue to exist in large numbers up to the end of 2007, by which time they will only have decreased by a projected 10.6%.

A 10.6% decline in our clients' population will not diminish workloads for our employees. Throughout the next five years and beyond, many of our war veterans will require enhanced, more attentive health care services and more personalized face-to-face assistance from the staff due to advancing age. Others, especially Canadian Forces veterans, will be seeking improved services to better access compensation programs, appropriate counselling and assistance to address quality of life concerns and needs arising from Canada's contribution to the international campaign against terrorism. In addition, we will continue to be a leader in service quality improvements. Our priorities in this Plan indicate that over the next four years, the workload associated with health care initiatives, remembrance and the pension process will be undiminished.

As noted earlier, the knowledge and expertise in health care for seniors and disability pension administration position the Department to make immediate, insightful contributions to relevant, national policy discussions. We recognize that in the longer term the acquired knowledge and expertise are transferable to the delivery of related programs and services. We will be prepared to consider such options and opportunities provided that they are appropriately resourced and that they do not compromise our service commitments to veterans and other current clients.

6. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

VAC will address the issues and priorities emphasized in this Plan through the following two Strategic Objectives.

OBJECTIVE 1 - INTEGRITY OF OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Over the next four years, we will continue to place an emphasis on ensuring that our core health, disability pension, compensation and remembrance programs meet the needs of veterans and other valued clients. We will strive to reach this objective by:

- Making sure that programs remain relevant in the face of changing and evolving needs of our clients.
- Ensuring programs are adequately resourced.
- Adopting an active, comprehensive case management role on the behalf of clients to coordinate and maximize access to services and benefits.
- Making use of continuous improvement models of service delivery.
- Maintaining our commitment to continue to offer face-to-face, personalized services.
- Treating all veterans and other clients with equal respect and attention.
- Continuing to review, improve and monitor our processes, including the use of technology, to improve program delivery and service quality.
- Ensuring adequate training and support for our staff.

OBJECTIVE 2 - ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Strengthening our human resources planning

The extensive research and wide consultations, and the 2001 assessment of our operating environment, which formed the basis of the planning process identified a clear need for better human resources planning. This planning will support us as we adapt to the organizational changes which will be experienced over the next decade to ensure that we have the right people in the right place at the right time to uphold our pledge of quality service to clients.

In order to meet this need, we will complete our work to structure our human resources planning so that it is closely aligned with the Department's strategic and business planning process.

Strengthening internal and external communications

Consultations held in support of VAC's 2001-2006 strategic planning process revealed that, in order to make our processes and programs more effective, we will have to find ways to improve our communication with clients, other government entities, partners and staff.

In order to meet this need, we will complete our redefinition, restructuring and resourcing of the corporate communications function to address current gaps and priorities; and strive to enhance communications skills and tools throughout VAC.

Connecting to the National Agenda

An important part of being more effective as a federal organization is becoming more involved in matters of national policy for the benefit of Canadians. We are well-positioned to contribute to many topics on the Government's list of priorities. Over the planning period, we will draw on our knowledge and experience to make a greater contribution to the national agenda in areas such as health care for seniors; disability compensation programs; and remembrance, including education programs for youth and nation building activities. The pursuit of this objective and the exchange of ideas

it entails will benefit the nation as a whole, while helping VAC improve programs and chart its future.

The Department's strategy in advancing this objective will continue to involve:

- Greater presence at federal interdepartmental, and intergovernmental planning and policy forums.
- Enhanced research and strategic policy development capacity.
- Development of an adequate policy development network to ensure regional and program representation.

7. OUR PRIORITIES

Veterans Affairs Canada will give first priority to fulfilling its long-standing commitment to those who matter the most through the course of each work day - veterans and other clients.

To meet this commitment, we will:

- Anticipate and respond to the changing needs of our traditional war veterans and adapt our programs and services to contribute in the best way possible, to their quality of life and well being.
- Provide top quality services to Canadian Forces veterans and still-serving members by ensuring that programs and services address their special needs and circumstances.
- Achieve the strategic priorities in this Plan without negative consequences to the quality of our current services to veterans and our other clients.
- Foster a culture of equal commitment to, and respect for, all clients.

Veterans Affairs' ten priorities are directly linked to our strategic objectives. Six of the ten priorities pertain to Objective 1 - Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement. The four other priorities pertain to Objective 2 - Organizational Effectiveness. For each priority, we have assigned responsibility and accountability to one or more Officers of Primary Interest (OPIs), whose job is to lead the work on this priority.

OBJECTIVE 1 - INTEGRITY OF OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Services to Canadian Forces veterans (ADM Veterans Services)

VAC and the DND have entered into discussions to determine how the present services and benefits for injured Canadian Forces members might be improved in response to

quality of life concerns and the needs arising from Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism. While one of the first priorities will be to clarify our role with regard to CF veterans, there are certain service improvements that we can begin to work on now.

A recent departmental review of the care needs of CF veterans has revealed some of the more pressing issues to be resolved:

- Adapt the disability pension process to the needs of CF veterans so that disability assessments and subsequent access to rehabilitation and other forms of health care are greatly accelerated.
- Provide more and better trained staff who can appropriately deal with CF veterans and their special circumstances within VAC's client-centred service approach.
- Make services available to assist CF veterans and their families with the transition from military to civilian life.

During the planning period, we will continue our collaboration with the DND and other partners to identify issues that must be addressed to fulfil our mandated role with regard to CF veterans. Supported by the work being done by the Veterans Affairs Canada - Canadian Forces Project and Continuum of Service Project, the Department will prepare proposals and requirements for service improvement as part of a strategy for implementing the Continuum of Services Project and Quality of Life initiative; and improving our contact with service to CF Reservists.

Remembrance (Executive Director, Public Affairs Branch)

The Department has completed its review of commemoration which explored ways of enhancing VAC's national Remembrance Program. Based on wide consultation with stakeholders, the Review proposed a vision, objectives and program adjustments which define the Department's future involvement in remembrance. It examined issues related to how the Canada Remembers Program may expand in recognition of Canada's peacekeeping role and how it may contribute to national priorities such as Canadian identity and the education of youth. The program includes organizing overseas pilgrimages to Canada's international memorial sites, the maintenance of cemeteries and battlefield memorials, and the organization of ceremonies to honour the sacrifices and achievements of Canadian veterans.

Health Care (ADM Veterans Services)

Our Service Approach

As we continue to explore the best ways of delivering our health care programs, we will remain committed to a Continuum of Service policy and a client-centred service approach. We will continue to involve the client as much as possible in determining his or her needs and in developing the best responses to those needs. As part of the case management process, we will strive to provide the best form of assistance to clients either through our programs and services or as the result of cooperative efforts with provincial and local agencies. Partnerships will be formed to optimize client access to services and will require the client's involvement in self-care and in health care planning decisions. In addition, our client-centred service approach will strive to provide access to services from one central point and will include face-to-face contact with clients.

Maintaining this service commitment for aging veteran clients and for a new generation of Canadian Forces veterans will put a great deal of stress on our staff. Area Counsellors, for example, already are carrying case loads that are beyond what is recommended for effective case management. Throughout the planning period, we will keep a close watch on the growing demand for counselling and other services, seeking additional resources, if required, to respond to increasing demand.

Partnerships

VAC has a strong and cooperative relationship with organizations that represent veterans and other clients. These organizations are instrumental in guiding the Department in its program improvement initiatives and are invaluable in making our services more responsive to, and mindful of, client interests. We will strive to further strengthen the relationships with veterans' and other client organizations.

Managing client needs on a comprehensive basis also means that we have to emphasize effective partnerships within provincial health care systems and with community organizations. Such partnerships are of great importance in making proper referrals and providing a proper response when required services are either shared, or only available outside the Department. While all VAC regions have developed important partnership networks, there is more to be done to ensure their fuller development and greater integration into our case management approach. We will strive to improve the management of our health partnerships.

Research Capacity

An important prerequisite to meeting the service expectations of our clients, and Canadian Forces veterans especially, is that we be equipped with the required research knowledge and expertise to assess clients' health conditions and then be able to provide them with the most appropriate and timely form of compensation, rehabilitation or health service benefit. We will focus on enhancing our research capacity and access to research to strengthen the ability to meet our responsibilities.

Health Care Coordination Initiative

The Health Care Coordination Initiative (HCCI) represents an important forum for VAC. It unites federal departments which are involved in providing health care services to clients and public servants. As such, it is often a testing ground for establishing policies and best practices that result in efficiencies and savings in the purchase of health care services and supplies. As a leading member and Chair of the Executive Committee, we are well positioned to champion an expanded role for the HCCI. We will encourage the expanded use of HCCI as the principal instrument to coordinate the federal response to the health services report card and as an important forum to assist in developing useful federal policies, positions and information. This outcome would contribute to the strategic priority of offering greater input into national health policy.

Ste. Anne's Hospital (ADM Veterans Services)

Ste. Anne's Hospital, located in the western end of Montreal, is the last remaining federal hospital administered by VAC. This long-term care facility currently accommodates some 560 veteran patients. Recent efforts to transfer the facility to the province of Quebec and thereby secure the Hospital's long-term future, have not proven successful. Nonetheless, the Province has expressed a willingness to explore partnership opportunities. Until such time as the Hospital's long-term future is clarified, its operations and the provision of quality care and services for veterans will remain a priority. Over the next five years, renovations are planned for Ste. Anne's to upgrade the facility to federal and provincial standards. This will improve services to veteran patients, and leave open the possibility of a future transfer to the Province. To further secure the Hospital's future, we will work toward recognition of the Hospital as a centre of excellence for the care of the aged; create a strategic plan for the newly renovated Hospital; and continue to seek enhanced partnerships between the Hospital and Quebec.

Under this initiative, some new services have already been put in place. Since July 2001, the Ste. Anne's Hospital Mental Health Clinic offers services to former and active members of the military and their families. Over the next four years, the staff of the Ste. Anne's Hospital

Mental Health Clinic will continue to develop leading-edge expertise in order to become a national reference centre.

The Disability Pension Process (ADM Veterans Services)

VAC has invested considerable time and energy during the past five years to improve its disability pension process. The dedicated efforts of staff have resulted in the claims processing time being reduced by half on most clients' applications. Although these efforts have made a difference, recent consultations with veterans' organization and client groups have confirmed that there is still room for improvement. We are evaluating the disability pension process to find solutions to client concerns that the disability pension process is still too complex and lengthy. The Review will also address ways of adapting the current process to better respond to the special needs and circumstances of Canadian Forces veterans.

Information Technology/Government On-Line (ADM Corporate Services)

Our technology investments will continue to support the strategic directions contained in this Plan, with emphasis on investments and innovations that offer significant value for money and directly support the federal Government-On-Line service initiative. Web-enabled technologies that provide our clients with on-line access to our services in a secure, user-friendly fashion will be available. We will also improve the electronic storage and retrieval of business information.

Such investments will be assessed in the context of the Department's recently implemented Information Management / Information Technology Governance Model. The VAC Information Management/Information Technology (IM/IT) Strategic Plan is scheduled for completion by Spring 2002.

The emerging capacity to offer services on-line will not diminish our commitment to traditional services offered by telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings.

OBJECTIVE 2 - ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Strategic Policy Capacity (Deputy Minister)

Veterans Affairs Canada will become better connected with national and inter-departmental policy forums that deal with subject areas directly relevant to our mandate and programs. We will benefit from this more direct engagement in strategic policy development, positioning us to contribute our experiences, and learn from the experiences of others involved in the creation and delivery of similar programs and services. As previously mentioned, we are well equipped to speak authoritatively on seniors health care, disability pension administration, service delivery, and Canadian identity issues. Moving in this direction, we have already strengthened our strategic policy capacity and begun an assessment of the contributions we can make to national policy initiatives focussed on the Federal Government's agenda pertaining to Canadians with disabilities and health care for seniors.

Human Resources (ADM Corporate Services)

VAC will not be able to realize its corporate objectives and related strategic priorities without a credible Strategic Human Resources Plan that addresses important issues such as staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities, the need for greater diversity in the workplace, assistance for employees through transition, employee counselling, and effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. The Department will continue to support government-wide strategic objectives related to Public Service renewal and classification reform to ensure that our human resource capacity is adjusted to meet the challenges ahead.

Strategic human resources planning will be one of the Department's top priorities over the next few years. During this time, VAC will continue its initiatives dealing with official languages, career development, employment equity, values and ethics, leadership and similar efforts. Special emphasis will be placed on completing the Strategic Human Resources Plan in 2002-2003. This Plan, to be shaped within the context of VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan, will be written with emphasis on the following four themes:

- Building a Learning Organization.
- Increasing Diversity.
- Recruiting and Retaining Staff.
- Modernizing Human Resources Practices.

Communications (Executive Director, Public Affairs Branch)

During recent years, VAC's communications capacity has been strained. In the near future this strain on communications resources is expected to continue as the Department attempts to:

- Improve communications with clients and make information on programs and services more accessible.
- Expand communications with the Canadian public as part of a growing Canada Remembers Program.
- Respond to the increasing need to improve communications with staff on ongoing program, systems and policy changes.
- Become more involved in strategic communications to improve the Department's profile inside and outside the public service.

As part of its effort to address these issues, we have completed an organizational review of our communications function and assured it is appropriately defined, structured, and resourced. Work also has begun on a Strategic Communications Plan which will be aligned with VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan and implemented starting in 2002-2003.

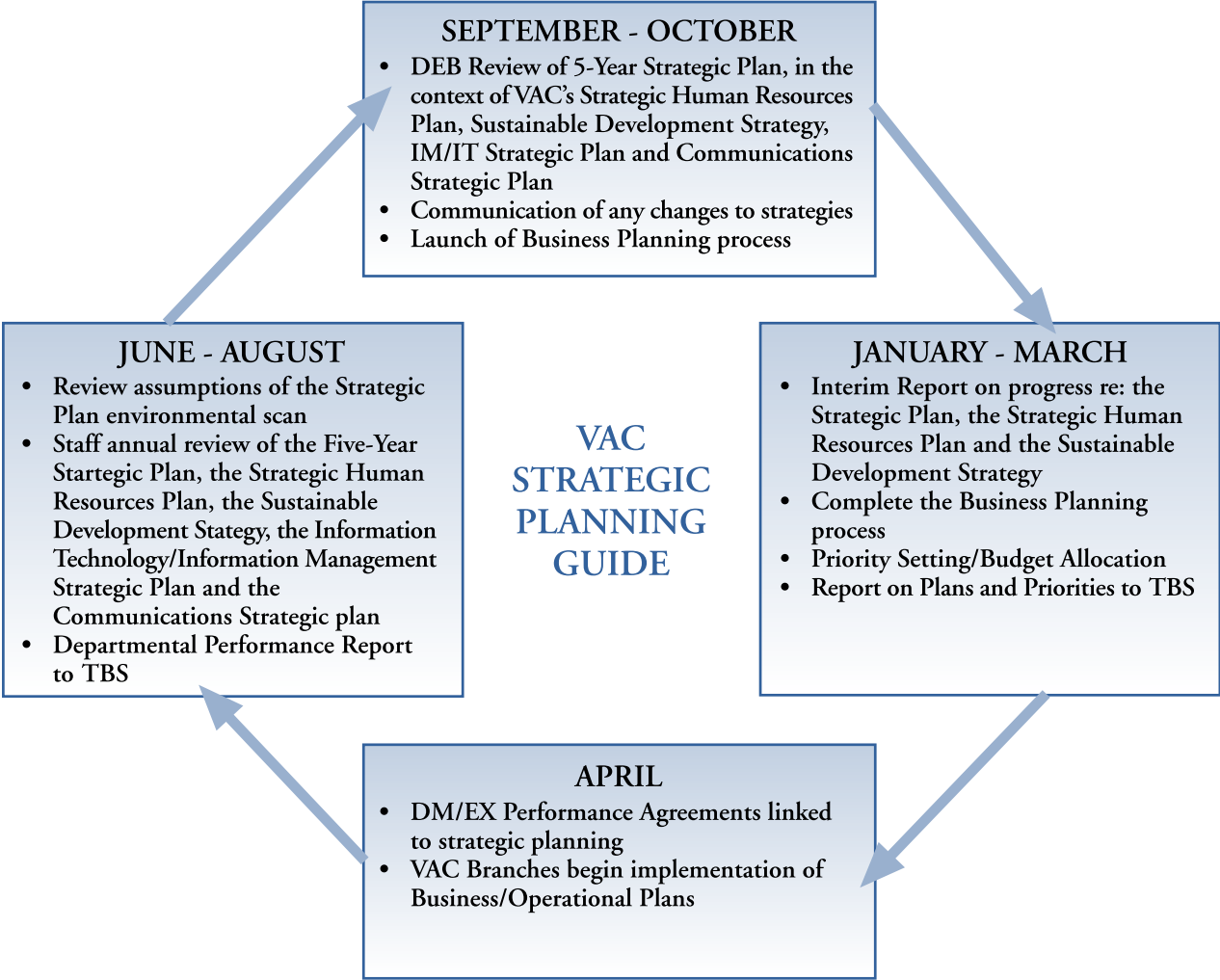
Planning and Resource Allocation (DG Corporate Planning)

VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan is a vibrant document, not to be placed on a shelf and forgotten. It is part of a continuous process that guides business, human resources, information management/information technology and sustainable development planning in the Department.

The illustration below indicates how the Strategic Plan is updated on a cyclical basis and becomes part of our overall planning and reporting process.

Figure 3:

VAC Five-Year Strategic Planning Cycle and Linkages to Business/Operational Plan



Priority Setting

Each September, we will adjust and reaffirm our strategic priorities through a review of this Strategic Plan, in the context of our Strategic Human Resources, IM/IT and Strategic Communications Plans and Sustainable Development Strategy. The resulting strategic priorities will then guide the business planning requirements. Resulting operational objectives and goals will be measured, monitored and reported annually. We are committed to an in-depth strategic planning exercise every fifth year, or at the call of our Departmental Executive Board.

Reporting on progress

To keep the strategic planning process open and accountable, we report twice a year on progress in advancing our strategic priorities. The first report is tabled at the annual Strategic Planning Meeting of the Departmental Executive Board each Fall, and provided to employees after the meeting. The second time will be at the end of each fiscal year when the report on progress will feed into both the management performance review process and the Department's Performance Report to Parliament. Both of these reporting commitments will be made easier as a result of the previously noted designation of "Officers of Primary Interest" for each strategic priority contained in this Plan.

8. CONCLUSION

Veterans Affairs Canada's Strategic Plan is essentially a framework for implementing our vision over a dynamic five-year period. Built on the strength of an extensive study and wide consultation within and outside the Department in 2000 and a 2001 assessment of our operating environment, it addresses several strategic questions and issues of importance to stakeholders.

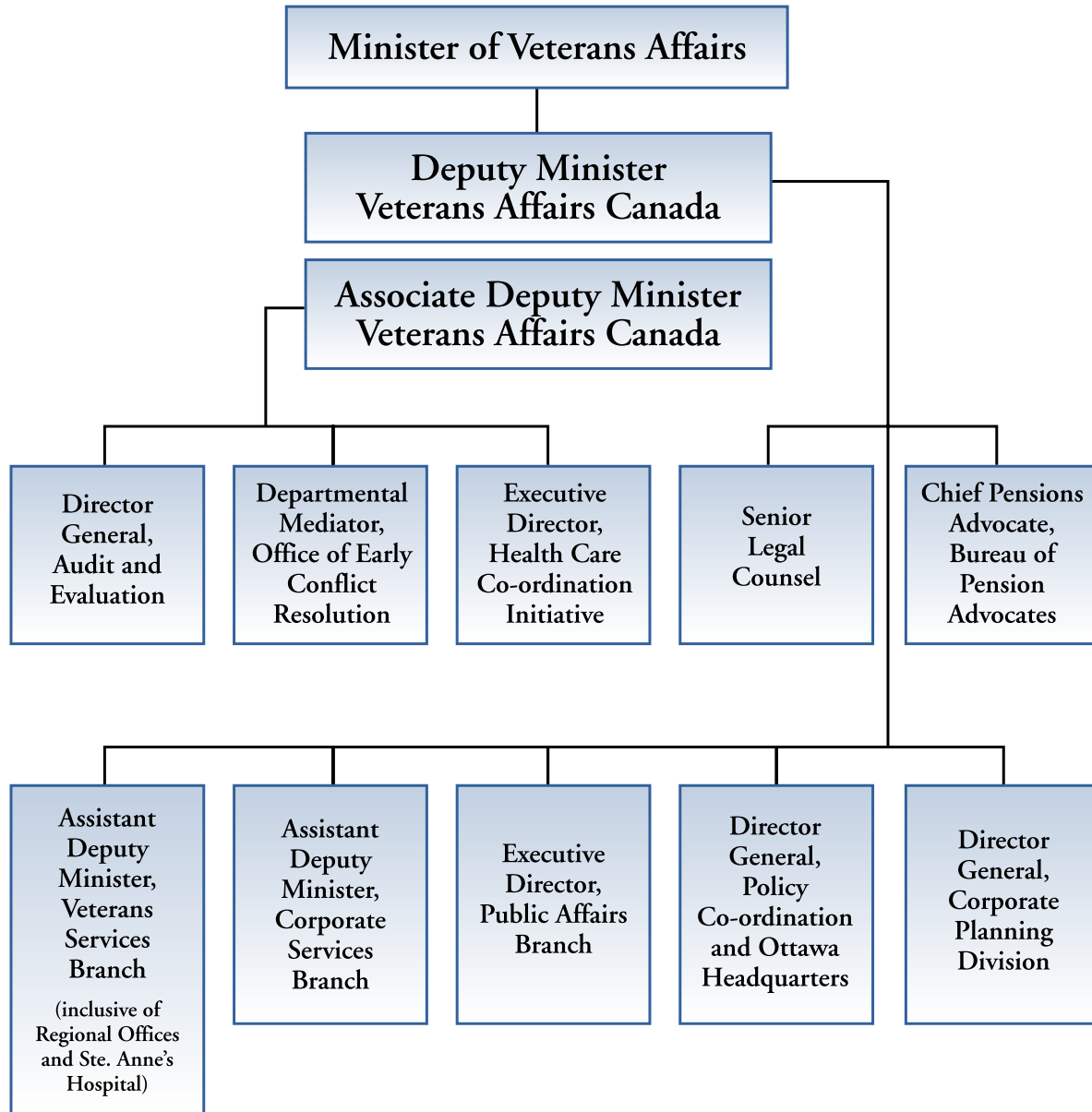
For veterans, other clients and veterans' organizations, it provides the assurance that we will do our utmost to improve programs and services to stay in step with their evolving needs and changing circumstances. It also reaffirms a commitment to maintain personalized services and not to compromise service quality due to any strategic initiatives within the Plan. Finally, it deals with many areas of concern including the need to improve communications with clients and address certain program shortcomings.

For staff, the Plan provides the promise of a challenging, vibrant and caring workplace. It outlines our commitment to improve training and learning opportunities, achieve balanced workloads and provide support for staff in adapting to change and achieving service improvement initiatives. More importantly, the Plan provides direction. It gives employees a common understanding of the Department's mission, vision and values as well as the priorities which we will emphasize over the next four years.

For partners, it outlines the future intention to strengthen our partnerships to improve the delivery of services, to share valuable information and to enable a larger departmental contribution in several research and strategic policy areas related to health care, benefits, seniors and other priorities contained in the 2001 Speech from the Throne.

For Canadians, this Plan represents a commitment that we will continue to honour and care for those who have served our country and who deserve their nation's thanks. It also reflects a clear commitment to do so with compassion, and in a manner that reflects the best available practices.

DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW



The Minister is responsible to Parliament for the Department of Veterans Affairs

HOW TO CONTACT VAC

Reader feedback

We would greatly appreciate your comments on this Five-Year Strategic Plan. We invite you to communicate your comments to the Corporate Planning Division at: plan@vac-acc.gc.ca or the following address:

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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). They may also be obtained from our district or regional offices across Canada or from the Communications Division, at the following address:

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