



Veterans Affairs
Canada

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VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
2001-2006

Canada

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

At Veterans Affairs Canada we take pride in our long history of service to Canada's war Veterans, our efforts to improve services for Canadian Forces (CF) Veterans and still-serving members, and our growing relationship with our newest clients, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Our dedication and commitment to our clients and their families is a reflection of our deep respect and admiration for those who served us so well in times of conflict and peace, whether in active duty combat roles, international peacekeeping and peacemaking operations, or domestic and international law enforcement.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs, it is my honour to present this annual update to our *Five-Year Strategic Plan*. In it you will learn about our ongoing commitment to Canada's war Veterans, our plans for modernizing the programs and services for Canadian Forces clients, and our new 'youth-based' approach to Remembrance programming. Indeed, the strategic priorities outlined in UPDATE 2004 reflect the nation's gratitude to our Veterans, the realities of modern military service, and our rapidly shifting client demographics.

Veterans Affairs' strategic direction is two-fold, supporting the health and wellness of our clientele while promoting remembrance as a significant component of our national identity. To achieve these priorities we have begun to take the necessary steps to modernize our services and benefits for Canadian Forces members and their families, while embarking on targeted in-Canada, community-based remembrance programming as we pass the 'Torch of Remembrance' to our youth. With 2004 marking the 60th anniversaries of D-Day, the Battle of Normandy, and the *Italian Campaign*, this is a particularly momentous year, with activities planned across the country and overseas.



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Building upon our accomplishments, I have every confidence that our forward-looking approach will ensure that our clients continue to be well-served. They deserve no less. At the same time, Veterans Affairs will ensure high levels of accountability, transparency and value-for-money in everything we do. Without doubt, the professionalism and integrity of VAC staff bodes well for strengthening public sector management throughout our Portfolio.



The Honourable Albina Guarnieri, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Veterans Affairs

DEPUTY MINISTER'S MESSAGE

My admiration and appreciation for the men and women who risk the perils of service in military and law enforcement operations at home and abroad has deepened since becoming Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada last year. Without doubt, their courageous efforts have been instrumental in ensuring our peace and freedom and contributing to security in other parts of the world.

Over the past year, I have been fortunate to meet with war Veterans and Canadian Forces Veterans and to hear first-hand of their incredible achievements and of their sacrifices and losses as well. These encounters have reinforced the importance of moving in new directions to ensure that we effectively respond to the contemporary needs of our clients. This is critical if VAC is to provide benefits and services that address the real issues and challenges confronting our clients. UPDATE 2004 outlines how the Department plans to proceed in the coming years to continue to ensure the integrity of our programs, promote service improvement, and enhance our organizational effectiveness.

VAC has made great strides in expressing our nation's gratitude to war Veterans by providing services that respond to their changing needs. We've made significant progress in addressing some of their top priorities, for example, by strengthening programs that support the independent living of Veterans and their spouses who wish to remain in their homes and communities. While



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the Department's proud tradition of evolving to meet the emerging needs of war Veterans has led to a solid program base for this client group, our repertoire of benefits and services to meet the current and future needs of younger clients with different military and life experiences in the 21st century is less well developed. Similarly, some of our work with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is in its early stages.

Now it's time to modernize our programs so that we can better assist younger CF Veterans and their families in their transition from military to civilian life. With this in mind, I created the *Service and Program Modernization Task Force* to oversee the development of a comprehensive suite of programs and services focussed on rehabilitation and reintegration that better support the wellness and well-being of CF clients. At the same time, the Department is taking the steps needed to ensure that we preserve the legacy of our war Veterans and honour modern-day heroes by transforming our approach to commemoration. Youth will be at the forefront as VAC helps them to become the new leaders of recognition and remembrance.

VAC staff are the backbone of the Department. It is through their steadfast dedication, professionalism and expertise that we can achieve even greater success in the coming years by continuing to meet the needs of our highly deserving family of clients.



Jack Stagg
Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Canada

OUR MANDATE

Veterans Affairs Canada exists to serve and pay tribute to the brave men and women of Canada who have unselfishly contributed to global peace and security in times of war and in a variety of peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian operations around the world. The same responsibilities hold as true today as when the Department was established in 1944:

to provide for “the care, treatment, or re-establishment in civil life of any person who served in the Canadian Forces in pursuits relating to war and the care of (their) dependants or survivors”

In an attempt to repay the nation’s debt of gratitude for service to the country, VAC offers programs and services designed to: meet the needs of war Veterans whose advancing years bring a unique set of demands; to assist Canadian Force clients and their families in their transition from military to civilian life; and to keep the flame of remembrance alive so that future generations understand the price of freedom.

The breadth of Canada’s contributions to world peace and security is reflected in the highly diverse clientele served by VAC. In addition to the traditional war Veterans from the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War, VAC’s clients include former and still serving members of the Canadian Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and eligible family members (survivors and dependants).

Throughout the years, VAC has maintained a proud tradition of evolving to meet clients’ changing needs. We will continue to uphold this commitment by ensuring that our programs and services respond to the contemporary needs of our clients and honour the courageous efforts of all of Canada’s Veterans.

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 sacrifices 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 VAC's *Five-Year Strategic Plan 2001-2006* was launched in June 2001, the Departmental Executive Board (DEB) committed to an annual review and update to ensure that the *Plan* continued to reflect current realities, emerging issues and new challenges. In keeping with this decision, annual reviews were conducted as part of DEB's strategic planning retreats in September 2001 and November 2002.

In June 2003, the strategic planning and priority-setting process was adjusted to coincide with the implementation of quarterly DEB planning sessions, which are convened in the spring, summer, fall and winter. These extended DEB meetings provide senior management with an opportunity to review progress in advancing VAC's priorities and to identify and discuss key issues of strategic and operational importance to the Department and its future directions. This new cycle also provides for a better alignment between strategic planning and other departmental planning processes. As such, it allows for the outcomes of DEB's discussions to be factored into human resource, IM/IT, and business planning, risk management, and the notional allocation of resources. The cycle culminates in the release of the annual updates to the *Strategic Plan*.



A more comprehensive strategic planning exercise is conducted every five years, with the next one expected to start in 2004-05, with extensive consultations with internal and external stakeholders held during 2005. The results will serve as the basis for VAC's *Five-Year Strategic Plan 2006 - 2011*. The illustration in Appendix A depicts the linkages with other departmental processes, which form part of our overall planning and reporting process.

UPDATE 2004 outlines how VAC plans to ensure continued support to its changing family of clients. Our war service Veterans will continue to need help with their increasingly complex health care needs and CF Veterans, RCMP clients, and their families will require assistance in making the transition to civilian life. All Canadians will need to be educated so that they understand and remember the important role played by Canada's Veterans in the pursuit of world peace and security.

THE PLANNING ENVIRONMENT

The operating environment within which VAC's programs and services are delivered and our policies are implemented is characterized by a variety of internal and external factors. The Government's broader policy priorities, the aging of Canadians, the growing involvement of military and police personnel in international and multilateral operations, the implementation of health reforms with provincial/territorial partners, as well as fiscal realities, must be taken into account as we develop and deliver programs and services for our clients.

VAC's strong support for and participation in horizontal initiatives, such as Government On-Line, Human Resources Modernization, Modern Comptrollership, and other government-wide efforts designed to promote greater accountability and transparency in the delivery of services to Canadians also influence VAC's operations and approaches to service delivery. Above all, changing client demographics, service expectations, and program needs are of critical importance in shaping VAC's strategic direction.

The Government Policy Agenda

The Government has established a clear vision for the future of Canada focussing on four key themes - strengthening our social foundations, stronger financial management and accountability, ensuring Canada's place in the world, and building a 21st century economy. These policy directions were set out in the Speech from the Throne of February 2004. More recently, the Federal Budget in March 2004, outlined how the Government plans to deliver on its vision and emphasized the importance of prudent fiscal management.

VAC is well-positioned to advance the Government's agenda in key areas and to help achieve critical success by pursuing new policy directions to better serve Veterans in a changing world.

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Canada's Involvement in International Operations/Conflicts

“There is no role more fundamental for government than the protection of its citizens.” (SFT 2004). Veterans’ service to Canada in conflicts in the 20th and 21st centuries is recognized and rewarded, in large part, through programs and services offered by the Department.

In recent years, the pace of deployments and the number of CF members serving in peacekeeping missions and other international operations have increased significantly, with frequent and prolonged deployments to war zones. National Defence documents indicate that above-average operational demands have yielded higher levels of stress-related illnesses among troops. In the face of these challenges, our CF personnel have served Canada with pride. However, Canada’s growing participation in international and multilateral operations has led to an increased number of CF Veterans and still-serving members seeking assistance from VAC.

Over the last three years, our CF client population has increased 58% and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. As a result, there is an urgency to respond to their needs in a way that fulfills our commitment to take care of injured personnel by promoting health and wellness. At the same time, we must pay tribute to their efforts, accomplishments and sacrifices, along with those of our war Veterans.

Global threats and conflicts have also created challenges for law enforcement at both the policy and operational levels. Against this backdrop, VAC is cognizant of the need to ensure that programs are in place to address the needs of RCMP clients.

Aging of Canadians

There are currently 3.9 million seniors in Canada and this number is expected to double to 7.8 million by 2025. By 2026, seniors will constitute one of every five Canadians, making seniors the fastest growing age group in Canada. The shifting demographics of the Canadian population will continue to have an impact on the delivery of Government programs and services. This is no less true for Veterans Affairs given that war Veterans account for a substantial proportion of the senior population in Canada. Indeed, approximately 8% of all seniors are Veterans.

Sadly, with an average age of 82 years, the number of war Veterans is declining steadily. Interestingly, they have now surpassed the life expectancy of males in Canada which is 75 years. As the population continues to age, promotion of healthy aging will become even more critical.

The Task Force on Active Living and Dignity for Seniors examined seniors programming and community-based approaches and reported to the Prime Minister in its report *Creating a National Seniors Agenda* (May 2004). The report identifies policy changes needed to improve the quality of life for seniors and contains 17 recommendations including “testing a home independence program for seniors” modelled on VAC’s VIP Program. Given our expertise and experience serving an elderly Veteran population, VAC is well-positioned to support Government efforts to promote independent living among Canadian seniors.

Health Reform in Canada

Health care continues to be a national priority and the implementation of health reforms will have a direct impact on the lives of our clients. Indeed, the Government has made significant investments in health care and has asserted that improving the overall health of Canadians must include a renewed focus on health promotion. This is no less important for VAC as we strive to improve the health of our clients. We will ensure that the increasingly complex health and home care needs of our elderly war Veterans are met, and will continue to assist aging Veterans and their spouses to remain independent in their homes and communities. At the same time, VAC must respond to the physical and mental health needs of younger Canadian Forces clients and their families.

Recent health initiatives, including the creation of the *Health Council*, further developments in home and community care, palliative and end-of-life care, and the promotion of healthy living may have an impact on or be of benefit to VAC.

The *Health Council*, which began its operations in December 2003 and is comprised of representatives from both orders of government, experts and the public, will monitor and make annual public reports on the implementation of the February 2003 *First Ministers’ Accord on Health Care Renewal*. The *Council’s* work will help Canadians

assess the performance of the health system and the pace of implementation of the various commitments made in the Accord. As such, VAC will need to be aware of the *Council's* work and the relevance of its findings to our own programs and services.

Similarly, progress in defining a national minimum basket of home and community care services, including palliative and end-of-life care, to be covered by provincial health insurance plans, may influence VAC's program operations and/or delivery mechanisms.

The work of the *Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology* on mental health and mental illness in Canada is of interest to VAC. Considering the Department's growing body of knowledge on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological injuries related to military trauma, and the mental health care services offered through the Ste. Anne Centre, VAC is well-positioned to help bridge the gap between research and clinical practice in the mental health domain.

The Economic and Fiscal Situation

"The Government of Canada is unalterably committed to fiscal prudence, as evidenced by annual balanced budgets and steady reduction in the debt relative to the size of the economy." (SFT 2004). Other measures, including an ongoing process of expenditure review, overseen by a new Committee of Cabinet, will ensure that spending reflects priorities and that tax dollars are wisely invested. Against this backdrop, all departments will be challenged to assess and decide upon the reallocation of existing spending to move from lower to higher priorities. The financial capacity of VAC to respond to emerging issues and pressures, and our flexibility to internally reallocate resources to meet changing needs, will influence our plans and activities. VAC will continue to look for more efficient ways to deliver services and re-invest efficiencies in the form of service and program improvement.

Unexpected Shocks and Disasters

Over a period of a few months in 2003, Canadians were unexpectedly hit with hazardous events such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), West Nile virus, floods, drought, hurricanes, unprecedented forest fires and a huge power black-out. Just as these disasters had an impact on Canadians, they also affected our Veterans. VAC recognizes that, while such events are unpredictable, we must be aware of their potential implications and be well-prepared to minimize the impact of possible future events on service to our clients. This is particularly important given the age and life circumstances of some of our clients, and the Department's interface with the health care sector.

Democratic Reform

In February 2004, the Government tabled its *Democratic Reform Action Plan* aimed at re-engaging Canadians in political life and returning Parliament to the centre of national debate and decision making. In considering how it can best contribute to the Government's efforts, VAC will build on the solid relationship it has developed with Veterans' organizations and the support given to the work of the Parliamentary Committees and individual MPs and Senators. The Department values the advice and input of Parliamentarians, as representatives of Canadians at large, in helping shape its policies and priorities. Indeed, VAC has worked closely with Parliamentarians in the past to respond to the needs of Canada's Veterans as well as former and still-serving members of the Canadian Forces. This bodes well for a positive and constructive relationship in the coming years.

Trends in Service Delivery

New information and communication technologies have enabled changes that have affected all aspects of daily life. The Internet has transformed the way in which Canadians live and work and, with e-government, the potential is enormous. Clearly, we are moving to more personalized service delivery and seamless accessibility to all government programs. Working in partnership across jurisdictions continues to be the way to do business.

VAC's client-centred service approach and Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISDF) serve as the foundation 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. The ISDF recognizes that VAC's approach to improved service delivery is ongoing and will continue to evolve as the needs of our clients change and we learn from our experiences.

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 resources will be focussed on providing quality client service consistently across the country in order to preserve our high level of client satisfaction. The overall level of client satisfaction, as reported by VAC's major client groups in 2003, continues to remain high with 87% of survey respondents indicating that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with VAC's programs and services.

Innovative Staff and a Vibrant Organization

Organizations that succeed in reaching their goals do so, in large part, because they have passionate, dedicated employees who have the courage to take on change. As VAC refocuses its priorities in an environment of limited resources and increased fiscal accountability, continued innovation will be required to ensure improved client service delivery.

Over the next few years, demands on VAC staff will increase as they continue to meet the needs of war service Veterans and, at the same time, increase their understanding of the health and transition needs of Canadian Forces clients and members of the RCMP. How VAC manages its human resource challenges during this period will impact the extent to which it achieves its goals.

With this in mind, the development and implementation of recruitment, learning and workplace well-being strategies will help ensure that VAC has the right people in the right place at the right time to uphold its commitment to service excellence and to set an example as a dynamic learning organization.

THE VETERAN POPULATION AND THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

At Veterans Affairs, we provide programs and services to a diverse and evolving clientele. In so doing, we must maintain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of our family of clients as this awareness is critical to achieving our vision.

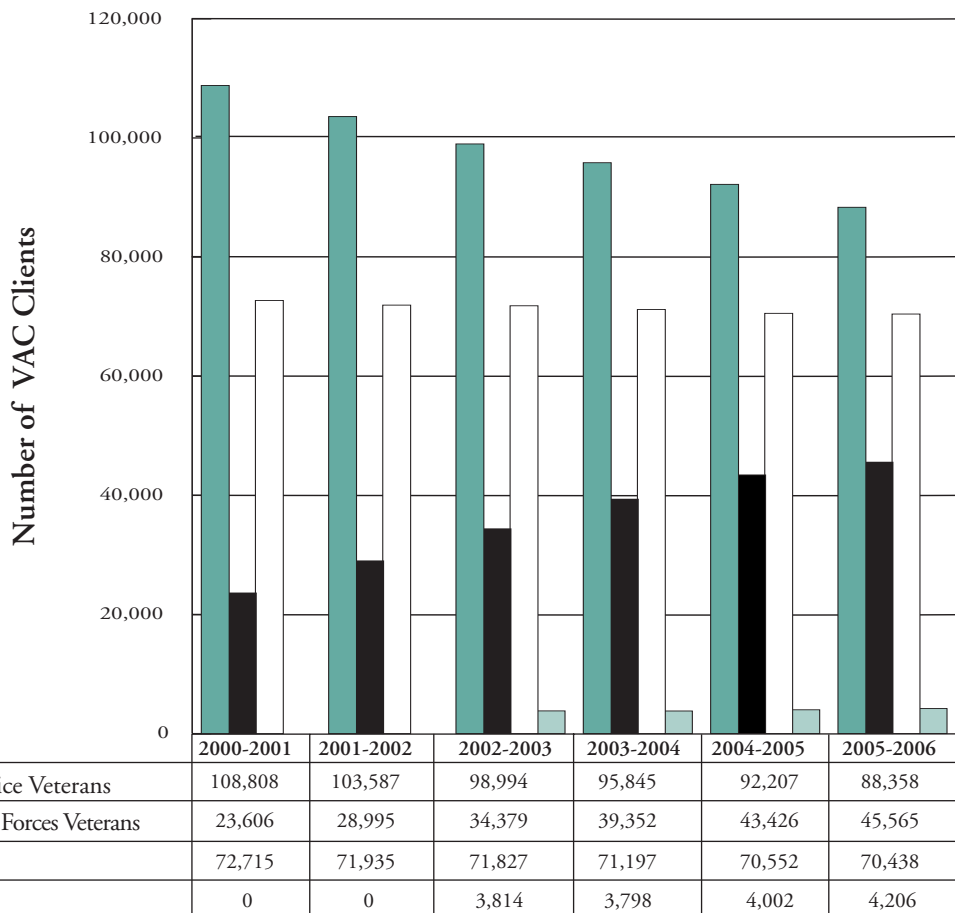
When we speak of the “Veteran” population, this includes Canada’s traditional war Veterans - the men and women who served during the First World War, Second World War, and the Korean War - and also incorporates former Canadian Forces members in recognition of their service to Canada in modern day operations, such as international peacekeeping missions. Our family of clients also extends beyond Veterans to include spouses, children, and caregivers of Veterans, still-serving Canadian Forces members, past and present members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and certain Allied Veterans and eligible civilians. We also serve Canadians more broadly through our Remembrance activities, both in Canada and overseas.

Having reached an average age of 103 years, there are very few Veterans of the First World War still with us today. The vast majority are Second World War Veterans, with an average age of 82 years, followed by Korean War Veterans, who are 73 years old on average. This is in stark contrast to the much younger and growing Canadian Forces population served by VAC. Indeed, the average age of releasing CF members is 39 years.

Statistical forecasts for March 2004 reveal an estimated 776,000 Veterans and Canadian Forces members alive today. This includes close to 284,000 Veterans from the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War, plus 410,000 CF Veterans, and approximately 82,000 still-serving CF members. 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 those who suffer from a service-related injury or are income qualified. As such, VAC is providing benefits and services to approximately 210,000 clients today.

As shown in Figure 1, over the full five years of the Strategic Plan 2001 to 2006, the Department will witness a decline in the number of aging war Veteran clients and a dramatic increase in the number of CF clients. The number of survivors (primarily spouses) served by VAC will remain relatively stable.

**Figure 1: VAC Clients by Client Group
March 2001 to March 2006**



Note: Statistical data on RCMP clients is not available for the period prior to 2002-03.

Clearly, the most remarkable change has been a 58% increase in CF clients, from approximately 23,600 in March 2001 to 39,300 in March 2004. This has been accompanied by an overwhelming increase in the number of Veterans applying for disability pensions, particularly over the past decade, and this trend is expected to continue. Unfortunately, the impact of the ever increasing demand for benefits and services has been a growing backlog and lengthening turnaround times for processing applications.

VAC recognizes that in order to provide our clients with the timely, attentive and professional service they deserve, wait times for decisions must be minimized and access to disability pension benefits and health care programs and services must be expedited. It is with this in mind that the Department is continuing its efforts to reduce turnaround times associated with the approval of disability pensions and the completion of health assessments. In recent years, efficiencies have been realized through the use of new technologies and by adopting creative business processes. A comprehensive Business Process Improvement Strategy designed to identify efficiencies in claims processing and claims adjudication and to help address backlog and turn around time issues has been put in place. In addition, the Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISDF) has been fully implemented within the Veteran Services Branch to assist in workload management issues across the client service spectrum. Red tape has been cut, making it easier for disability pensioners to obtain additional services.

In light of the Department's limited financial capacity, additional resources are also being sought to help address this situation. In pursuing these initiatives, VAC is confident that it can reduce the backlog in pension applications and bring turnaround times back to a reasonable response time. As always, we will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to ensure that quality service is maintained and service improvements are made where ever possible.



OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

VAC's strategic direction will continue to focus on serving both war Veterans and Canadian Forces clients and remembering the valuable contribution they have made to the lives of Canadians.

VAC is proud of the expertise it has acquired over the years in serving Canada's war Veterans. Today, VAC is well-positioned to address the needs of elderly war Veterans whose advancing age and deteriorating health often intensify their health care needs. The programs and benefits instituted in the last century, and enhanced in more recent years, serve as a solid foundation for responding to the needs of these Veterans, and their survivors and care givers. 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 strive for improvements in service and program delivery to ensure that war Veterans have access to the full range of programs and services, of which they are so deserving. VAC will pay particular attention to ensuring that turnaround times for responding to pension applications are reasonable and to reducing the backlog associated with the increase in the number of Veterans applying for disability pensions in the past decade.

Over the next two to three years, VAC will turn even greater attention to improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces clients and their families. Our first priority will be the modernization of services and benefits to better respond to the needs of CF Veterans, still-serving members, and their families.

The *Service and Program Modernization Task Force* will work on developing client-centered services through a comprehensive range of programs reflecting modern principles of disability management. Program components will include those aimed at transition and re-establishment; provision of health care; rehabilitation service; income replacement/support; and family support. The programs will encourage and provide incentives for independence and wellness while maximizing potential for participation in community life.

An equally important priority will be to ensure that the sacrifices and achievements made by Veterans during times of war, peacekeeping and peacemaking are never forgotten. Working with communities and young Canadians will be critical in fostering a better understanding of the linkage between Canada's military efforts and our development as a nation. Indeed, engaging youth in our remembrance activities is essential to keeping our Veterans' legacy alive for future generations and for ensuring that the contributions of today's military forces to peacekeeping efforts and other operations around the world are commemorated.



OUR PRIORITIES

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

In today's environment of multiple and competing demands and limited resources, VAC is prepared to make choices and to direct its attention, energy, human and financial resources to issues of highest priority. Indeed, the Executive team's decision to focus on fewer priorities reflects the need to adjust to new realities and respond to emerging issues.

Over the past year, significant progress has been achieved with respect to two of VAC's priorities. Since first identified as a strategic priority in 2001, significant progress has been made in evaluating the effectiveness of VAC's disability pension program and its flexibility to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of our Veterans and other clients. Phase I of the evaluation focussed on program relevancy and client impact, as well as certain aspects of the pension process such as the quality of decisions and location of decision-making. Phase II is proceeding as planned, with a focus on process and future program directions. Given the evaluation is expected to be substantially completed in the Summer 2004, it is no longer identified as a strategic priority for the coming years. It must be noted, however, that acting upon the findings of the evaluation will continue to be of critical importance to the Department as we strive to continue to improve our efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of our programs and services.

Similarly, the Department has undertaken significant work to strengthen its policy capacity. Recognizing that limited fiscal flexibility within Government will mean that policy proposals will be subject to rigorous scrutiny and must be well supported by research evidence and detailed analysis, VAC is making the most effective use of existing resources and harnessing current capacities. VAC's involvement in key interdepartmental policy initiatives is being bolstered through more consistent participation at senior level committees. In addition, the creation of the new Policy Planning and Liaison Division (through the amalgamation of Corporate Planning and Policy Coordination and Ottawa Headquarters) is helping to strengthen the Department's capacity to provide policy advice and coordinate services between the Department and the Minister's Office, central agencies and other federal departments. VAC's ongoing efforts in this area will be pursued outside the framework of the *Strategic Plan*.

Strategic Objective 1: Integrity of Our Programs and Service Improvement

- Improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces Veterans and still-serving members
- Re-focussing remembrance activities on the involvement of Canada's youth in community-based activities within Canada, while respecting our overseas responsibilities
- Partnering to serve the RCMP and eligible civilians
- Transforming service delivery and promoting innovation in policies and practices

Strategic Objective 2: Organizational Effectiveness

- Aligning our strategic human resources initiatives to support the goals of the organization and aspirations of our people
- Advancing the development of our information management and information technology capacity in support of service improvement, organizational effectiveness and Government-On-Line

PUTTING OUR PRIORITIES INTO ACTION

Improving and expanding services for Canadian Forces Veterans and still-serving members - ADM, Veterans Services

VAC's legislative mandate since 1944 has been to *"provide for the care, treatment, or re-establishment in civil life of any person who served in the Canadian Forces . . . and (their) dependants or survivors . . ."* Following the Second World War, VAC ably discharged its mandate through the provision of a full suite of programs and services focussed on getting back to civil life with the objective of having Veterans contribute to civilian society. Over the years, VAC's focus has shifted from re-establishment and rehabilitation, to programs and services that now target the needs of elderly wartime Veterans. Our programs fall short in meeting the needs of CF clients who, like their wartime predecessors, need help re-establishing themselves into civilian life upon completion of duty.

VAC is now positioning itself to better respond to the needs of CF clients and their families in the wake of a global shift from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. Over the past 20 years, new challenges have confronted the modern military. The pace of deployments and the number of CF members serving in peacekeeping missions and other international operations have increased significantly, with frequent and prolonged deployments to war zones. These experiences leave physical and mental scars, with returning soldiers suffering from physical and psychological injuries.

Over the next two to three years, VAC's *Service and Program Modernization Task Force* will research, develop and implement amendments to the content of programs and services to better satisfy the emerging needs of Canadian Forces Veterans and their families. Program components will include disability awards and wellness programs to replace today's pension system for new applicants; physical and psychological rehabilitation services, rehabilitation, as well as longer-term support for Veterans who can no longer work because of a service-related illness or injury; job placement assistance; and more extensive health benefits to meet the needs of Veterans and their families.

VAC will continue to work in close collaboration with the Department of National Defence in developing modernized programs. As well, consultations will be held with stakeholders as part of the initiation, research, development, and implementation components of this project.

In addition, VAC recognizes, as do all Canadians, the sacrifices and achievements of Canadian Forces clients who have served in international operations. With this in mind, VAC is creating a seventh Book of Remembrance, tentatively entitled “In the Service of Peace”, to be installed in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill in early 2005. This Book of Remembrance is being created to recognize those who have given their lives serving Canada in peacekeeping missions and international operations, including East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Afghanistan.

Re-focussing remembrance activities on the involvement of Canada's youth in community-based activities within Canada, while respecting our overseas responsibilities - Executive Director, Public Affairs

As our traditional war service Veterans advance in age, it becomes increasingly important that the sacrifices and achievements they have made on our behalf are not forgotten. In 2004 and 2005, Canada and her allies will commemorate the 60th anniversary of some of the most important events associated with the end of the Second World War, including: the 60th anniversary of D-Day and Battle of Normandy (2004); the 60th anniversary of the *Italian Campaign* (2004); and the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (2005).

These momentous events in Canadian history have shaped Canada's place in the world and the quality of life enjoyed by Canadians today. VAC is playing a leadership role in these commemorative events and is working in partnership with all levels of government, Veterans' organizations, educational institutions and communities to promote a greater awareness of Canada's role in these important victories in the lead up to the end of the Second World War.

Recognizing the difficulties that international travel and extended overseas events present to our aging clients, we are shifting our strategic direction and re-focussing remembrance activities on the involvement of Canada's youth in community-based activities within Canada. Canada's youth are our pride and future, and their development is a fundamental part of maintaining a solid foundation of citizenship in Canada.

Knowledge, engagement and community support are the cornerstones of the strategy which recognizes that creating a critical mass of Canadians who actively commemorate our Veterans' contributions is an important aspect of the cultural development of the nation and the protection of peace. It builds on the fact that today's youth are vitally interested in the social issues of our country and are showing a growing appetite to learn more about Canada's rich military past. At the same time, the Veteran community is eager to have their stories told to ensure that their legacy lives on. VAC will also expand its focus to recognize Canadian Forces veterans who continue to uphold Canada's commitment to protect and defend human rights worldwide.

Public demands for remembrance programming will continue to be met through the maintenance and creation of positive and effective partnerships with the public, private and voluntary sectors. Key partnerships include the Department of National Defence, Canadian Heritage, the Federal Advisory Council on Remembrance, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Last Post Fund Corporation, provincial and municipal government agencies, Encounters with Canada, the Dominion Institute, youth groups and educators.

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

For some time, VAC has been adjudicating disability pension claims on behalf of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). VAC is now taking on a more active role in the management of disability pension payments for serving and retired RCMP members. Over the next two 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.

To date, research undertaken in collaboration with the RCMP reveals that, while not necessarily sharing the same views, attitudes and mind-set as CF clients, the RCMP understand and appear to relate well to CF issues and concerns. This is, no doubt, linked to both groups having worked in/been exposed to similar situations and environments, including peacekeeping/SDA deployments.

In order to adequately address gaps in services/benefits, training will be required for VAC staff to increase their general understanding of the RCMP and the 'police' culture. The RCMP has a very active veterans' organization, which may become more vocal in expressing their issues/concerns to VAC in the future.

Transforming service delivery and promoting innovation in policies and practices - ADM, Veterans Services

Over the next two years, Veterans Affairs Canada will remain focussed on transforming service delivery and promoting innovation in the delivery of programs and services. In times of fiscal restraint, finding creative solutions is critical to preserving our proud tradition of quality client relationships.

The Integrated Service Delivery Framework is enhancing the programs and services delivered to clients by improving VAC's ability to monitor client care through pro-active screening and an integrated approach to case management. Work on the implementation of the ISDF is well under way and the appropriate tools and support to front line staff is being put in place to ensure that clients and their families will receive the programs and services needed using a consistent service delivery framework.

This integration of service delivery involves the establishment of client service teams, centres of expertise, and management centres. The ISDF will: support decision-making principles; provide consistency in service delivery across the country; establish clear organizational/reporting relationships to ensure clarity of role and performance expectations; establish work processes to ensure effectiveness; establish resource allocation formulas to ensure equitable distribution of human and financial resources; and provide a working environment where balancing priorities from staff groups and stakeholders can be managed.

In addition to the above, enhancement of VAC's partnerships with the public, private, and voluntary sectors continues. These partnerships enable VAC to improve its capacity to meet client needs.

The successful implementation of the ISDF will result in a more coordinated and integrated approach to the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of programs, policies and service delivery at all levels of the organization. The Framework also provides a basis for clearly defining roles and responsibilities throughout the organization, motivating staff and provides for performance assessments.

The major outcomes resulting from the implementation of the Integrated Service Delivery Framework are: the delivery of affordable services and quality programs that respond to the needs of Canadians; a focus on continuous improvement to these services and programs; an improved capacity in employees and VAC communities; streamlined structures and systems; and improved results and accountability.

Aligning our strategic human resources initiatives to support the goals of the organization and aspirations of our people - ADM, Veterans Services

VAC's *Human Resources Strategic Plan 2002-2007* was launched in November 2002. The Plan will assist VAC in handling the human resource changes that it will experience over the next few years and in attaining 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.*" Initiatives addressed in the Plan include recruitment in support of the department's operational priorities, learning and development, and the need for more modernized HR management. Ensuring greater diversity in the workplace and continued assistance to employees in managing stress and balancing workloads will remain high on the list of priorities.

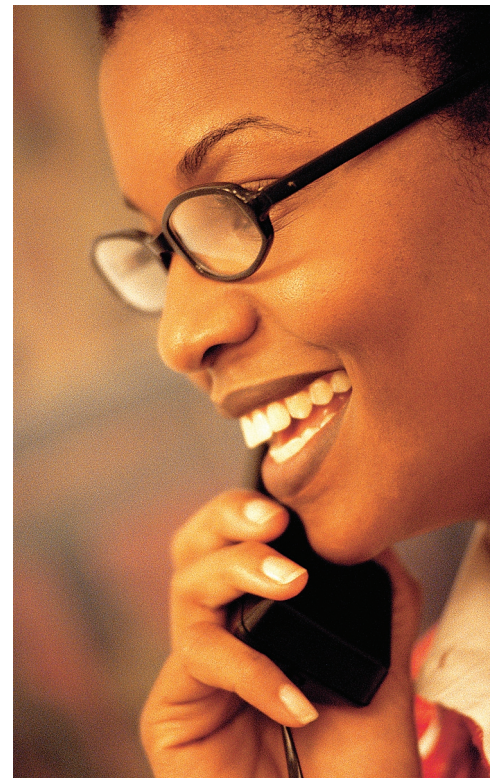
Implementation of VAC's key HR initiatives will be guided by Bill C-25, the *Public Service Modernization Act*. The new legislation, to be phased in over the next two years, covers three main areas of human resource management. It will modernize the staffing system, foster more constructive and harmonious labour management relations to improve the quality of the workplace, and promote a more corporate approach to learning and development. The pace and scope of the broader HR Modernization agenda will influence the extent to which VAC can move forward with major HR initiatives. Other factors that may influence progress are limited resources, budget pressures, a change in government priorities, recruitment and retention, and client demographics.

Having the right people in the right place at the right time is critical to the functioning of the organization. The challenge lies in attracting and recruiting the right talent and finding innovative and flexible ways to overcome staffing challenges and allocate resources to where they are most needed. Work will continue to be undertaken to improve our capacity to integrate human resource planning and management with strategic and business planning. This will be critically important as we move forward with efforts to modernize programs and services to respond to changing needs of our clients. As an organization, we must not only understand the impact that program changes may have on our workforce but we must be prepared to make the adjustments necessary to ensure that we have people with the right mix of skills to support and assist clients.

VAC is particularly aware of the need to ensure that HR planning proceed in tandem with the work of the *Service and Program Modernization Task Force* as it considers how the structure and content of VAC's programs and benefits should be modernized to better meet the needs of Canadian Forces and RCMP clients and their families. Over the next 12-18 months, the Task Force will lead the development of an HR Plan to ensure that VAC is well-positioned from both an HR and program perspective to support the delivery of any new benefits and services that may be offered as a result of this modernization effort. Moving forward, the goal is to develop and maintain a qualified, productive and sustainable workforce and foster an enabling work environment in a manner that is client-centred, innovative, streamlined and cost-effective. The plan will be implemented within the context of the ISDF and VAC's HR Strategic Plan.

As part of its efforts to support a continuous learning culture at VAC, a process has been initiated to identify, confirm and schedule departmental learning priorities. Nationally, this process will manage the operational impact of the delivery of essential learning services. The Learning and Development Committee will continue to bring strong recommendations to DEB in order to further develop Veterans Affairs as a learning organization. One of the key initiatives of the Committee has been to ensure that Learning Plans are offered to all VAC employees who want one by March 31, 2004.

Since implementation of HR Modernization is expected to take place over the coming months and years, VAC will provide training to managers, employees, human resources professionals and bargaining agents in order for each to understand their roles and responsibilities under the Act. Throughout the implementation process, maintaining diversity in staff and senior management and ensuring fairness and equality will be paramount. For example, VAC is training managers on the delegation of authority within a values-based framework and researching the use of pre-qualified pools to allow for more streamlined and consistent selection processes.



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

The benefits of information technology are numerous and, because of this, government is increasingly delivering more and more of its programs and services electronically. As government moves further into the electronic age, its ability to harness these benefits and manage information will be challenged significantly. VAC's *Information and Technology Services Five-Year Strategic Plan 2003-2008* will provide us with the direction needed to reach our goals.

One of VAC's goals for the next two years is rationalizing its current technology architecture and ensuring sustainability for future operations and service delivery. The Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) is the most important physical asset which supports program delivery but it must be modernized. For this reason, a business-led strategic review of service delivery options will be undertaken. Any resulting operating efficiencies could be used to help fund system enhancements and investments in new technology, such as portal development and web-enabled applications. These initiatives will facilitate improved on-line access to Departmental services for our internal and external clients, and Canadians at large, and directly support our Government On-Line (GOL) objectives.

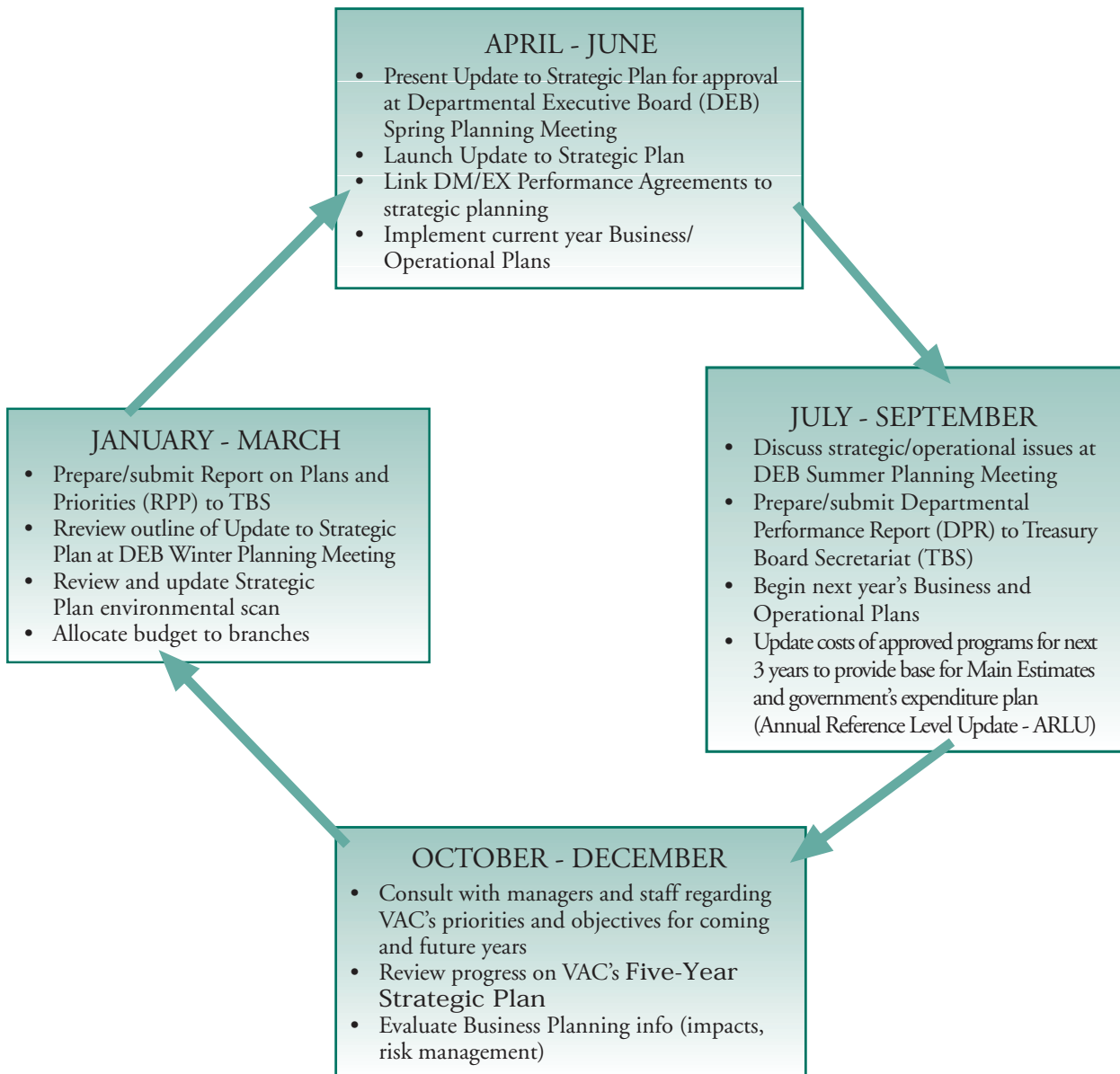
Implementation of the new IT Governance Process will help to improve management of Information Technology by linking Information & Technology Services initiatives and investments to the department's Business, Service Improvement and Strategic Plans. It will be important that VAC's IT investments continue to be business driven and not technology driven and that any outsourcing is based on "value-added" partnership arrangements. In the area of Information Management, a capacity check is currently underway at VAC to assess gaps and opportunities for improvement in this area.

Given the rapid change in technology, it will be important that staff's skills remain current. An IT Human Resource (HR) Strategy will be developed to ensure that VAC continues to have a professional competent IT staff as new technologies are implemented to support future business. It is also expected that upgrades to the Human Resource System will be required in the near future in order to provide employees and managers with increased capacity to manage human resource issues such as succession planning. IT is currently piloting a forecasting model on succession planning.

VAC's IM/IT objectives for the next five years include advancing the use of multi-channel electronic service delivery; developing an IT governance processes; rationalizing VAC's technology architecture; managing partnerships; integrating various ITS strategies and plans with the IT and Corporate Strategic Plans; and strengthening the IT policy capacity.

In accordance with Government of Canada trends toward common service delivery, VAC will undertake a review of corporate systems, including human resources and finance, to ensure congruence with evolving government-wide strategies.

VAC's Annual Planning and Reporting Cycle



HOW TO CONTACT VAC

Reader Feedback

We would greatly appreciate your comments on UPDATE 2004. We invite you to communicate your comments via e-mail to the Policy Planning and Liaison Division at: plan@vac-acc.gc.ca or the following address:

Director General
Policy Planning and Liaison Division
Veterans Affairs Canada
66 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0P4

General Inquiries

Should you wish to make a general inquiry about VAC programs or services, you may call the following toll-free number:

1-866-522-2122 (English)

1-866-522-2022 (French)

Client inquiries related to Canada Remembers, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board or other branches/units within the Department will continue to use the existing toll-free numbers listed below:

- Canada Remembers: 1-877-604-8489
- Bureau of Pensions Advocates: 1-877-228-2250
- Veterans Review and Appeal Board: 1-800-450-8006
Web site: <http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca>
- Foreign Countries Operations: 1-888-996-2242 (U.S. & Canada)

The telephone numbers and locations of the Regional Offices/District Offices/BPA Offices can be found 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). Some documents may also be obtained from our district and regional offices across Canada or from our Communications Division at the following address:

Communications Division
Veterans Affairs Canada
P.O. Box 7700
Charlottetown, PE C1A 8M9