

# STUDY ON THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO VETERANS

## GENERAL PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

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The study of service delivery that the Committee chose to undertake covers much of what is set out in the [mandate of the “Service Delivery Branch”](#) at Veterans Affairs Canada, which is “[to deliver] benefits and services and [to provide] social and economic support that respond to the needs of Veterans, our other clients and their families.”

That is the primary focus of the study: analyse the quality of the interactions between the department delivering the services and the individuals receiving them. To understand these interactions, the Committee will also focus on the communications between the department and its clients, the various aspects of the organizational culture, and how all of this is potentially affected by the department’s transformative process.

The purpose is not to determine whether to recommend legislative or regulatory changes to a given benefit or service, but rather to determine whether the current benefits and services are working as intended in the opinion of the individuals who should be receiving them: veterans and their families. Obviously if it becomes apparent that, in order to achieve their intended purpose, some services or benefits will need to be changed through legislation or regulation, the Committee will be able to make the appropriate recommendations.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

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1. One of the main objectives of the Veterans Affairs Canada Transformation Plan, launched a decade ago, was to reduce the complexity of service delivery.
  - According to your organization and the veterans you represent, would you say that the efforts to reduce the complexity of service delivery have been successful?
  - What do you see as the main challenges remaining in the delivery of services to veterans?
2. One of the priorities of the Veterans Affairs Canada Transformation Plan was to reduce wait times for decisions, particularly disability benefit and rehabilitation program decisions, and to make the treatment benefit decision-making process more flexible.
  - According to your organization and the veterans you represent, would you say that wait times for decisions have been reduced? If so, can you provide concrete examples or evidence in this respect?
  - Given that the primary reason for processing delays is incomplete applications, are you aware of any new initiatives to help veterans ensure that their applications are complete?
  - Since delays can also be related to the transfer of medical records between the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada, are you aware of any changes in the way these transfers occur?
  - What would you recommend to reduce wait times for decisions on disability benefits and rehabilitation programs?
3. An [August 2015 evaluation report](#) addressed the department’s commitment to meeting the service standard of responding to veterans within 16 weeks of receiving a disability benefits application. According to the report, this could have the perverse effect of encouraging adjudicators to focus on applications that can be handled more quickly, setting aside more complex applications and thereby delaying a response.

- Based on your experience, are there differences in the way Veterans Affairs Canada adjudicators treat applications based on their complexity?
  - Do you believe that the 16-week service standard is reasonable?
4. Of Veterans Affairs Canada's 200,000 clients, roughly 8,000 have complex cases requiring case manager involvement. Last year the [government announced that over 150 case managers would be hired](#), bringing the ratio to 30 clients per case manager.
- Have you witnessed improvements in the way veterans with complex needs can interact with their case manager?
  - For veterans whose needs are not sufficiently complex to warrant the involvement of a case manager, do you think that the number of veterans' service agents, and their competence, is sufficient?
5. One of the objectives of Veterans Affairs Canada Transformation Plan is to promote partnerships with the Department of National Defence in order to ease the transition process, and to strengthen partnerships with the private sector in order to promote the hiring of veterans.
- What initiatives are you aware of that show a stronger cooperation between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence in making the transition to civilian life easier for veterans?
  - Do you think that partnerships with the private sector should be encouraged to promote the hiring of veterans who have been released as a result of a physical or psychological injury?
6. In response to demographic and geographic changes in the veteran population, certain regional offices were closed two years ago, and some of their activities transferred to Service Canada offices. A [December 2015 internal evaluation](#) showed that the transfer of activities to Service Canada offices did not have the expected results, and the government announced that the closed regional offices would soon be reopened.
- In your view, what balance should be achieved between ensuring a concrete regional presence for Veterans Affairs Canada, and the use of technology or other government resources to reach out to veterans who live in less populated areas?
7. In your view, with respect to the delivery of medical care services to veterans (excluding mental health services):
- Are claims for medical services approved in a timely manner?
  - Is the process simple and flexible enough for veterans who need health care services?
  - Are veterans generally satisfied with the health care services they receive?
  - Are veterans generally satisfied with the way Veterans Affairs Canada treats their requests for health care services?
  - What would be your recommendations as regards the availability of health care professionals in less populated areas?
8. To your knowledge, with respect the delivery of mental health services, specifically:
- How do veterans evaluate the services provided in the operational stress injuries clinics setup by Veterans Affairs Canada?
  - Do you think that family members of veterans suffering from mental health problems should receive psychological and financial support from Veterans Affairs Canada?
9. With respect to the rehabilitation program under the New Veterans Charter:

- Do you think that the eligibility criteria for the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation programs should be tightened or loosened?
  - Are the delays reasonable between the time an application is approved and the beginning of the program itself?
  - Does the list of approved care providers sufficient to guarantee the quality of the care given to veterans who participate in a rehabilitation program?
  - How do you evaluate the results of the many changes to the vocational rehabilitation program made over the last 5 years?
10. With respect to long-term care:
- Do you think that the transfer of Ste. Anne's Hospital will affect the way Veterans Affairs Canada is able to provide long-term care services to veterans?
  - Do you think that Veterans Affairs Canada should continue to reserve long-term care places in provincial facilities, or should let veterans decide, based on the availability of provincial resources?
11. Are veterans generally satisfied with the services provided under the Veterans Independence Program?
12. With respect to the handling of claims for financial benefits by Veterans Affairs Canada:
- In your view, what elements of the application process for financial benefits could be improved?
  - Have you noticed differences in the way Veterans Affairs Canada treats applications for financial benefits relating to mental health problems, as opposed to physical problems?
13. During the last decade, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board was frequently criticized for not providing clear reasons for its decisions, and for not counting enough veterans and health care professionals on its panels.
- In your view, has the Veterans Review and Appeal Board improved the way it communicates the reasons for its decisions?
  - Do you think that the Veterans Review and Appeal Board should include more veterans and health care specialists?