

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE AND  
VETERANS AFFAIRS (SCONDVA)**

HONOURING THE PLEDGE: ENSURING QUALITY LONG  
TERM CARE FOR VETERANS

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CARE FOR VETERANS

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## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

### **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES**

#### **A. The Responsibilities of Veterans Affairs Canada**

##### **Recommendation 1**

**Veterans Affairs Canada review its policies on waitlists to ensure that it has the necessary level of information in all provinces in order to be as up to date as possible on the number of Veterans in priority beds and those waiting to have access to such beds.**

##### **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities and commitments to Veterans seriously. Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) agrees that it is necessary to have up-to-date information on Veterans in Priority Access Beds (PABs) and those awaiting placement. To this end, VAC has updated their information system to track the number of Veterans in long-term care beds. More importantly however, are two initiatives: the Overseas Service Veterans (OSV) at Home Pilot Project and the OSV Wait List Management Initiative. The OSV at Home Pilot Project launched in June 1999 provided Veterans Independence Program (VIP) and treatment benefits to eligible Veterans. The regulatory amendment implementing this initiative on a permanent basis received approval in principle and was pre-published in the Canada Gazette on 16 August 2003. Final approval is expected shortly. The OSV Wait List Management Initiative began in July 2000. These initiatives have increased VAC's flexibility to either provide care to Veterans in a community bed or to meet their health care needs at home while they await placement. Through these approaches, there should be no Veterans with "unmet health care needs". As well, these initiatives reduce the urgency to be placed in a facility and enable those with the most urgent needs to be placed in a more timely fashion.

##### **Recommendation 2**

**Veterans Affairs Canada review its procedures in order to ensure that it can effectively monitor conditions in all the facilities across Canada providing long-term care to Veterans and that it can take corrective measures in a timely fashion if and when a situation develops which threatens to reduce the access of Veterans to priority beds or the quality of care given to them.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that quality long-term care is available to meet the health needs of Veterans. PABs are reserved for Veterans as long as they are needed by Veterans. There are currently 4,310 such beds in 171 facilities across Canada.

Since 1998, staff at VAC's district offices have been visiting Veterans residing in long-term care facilities on an annual basis to complete the client satisfaction questionnaire. Should the Veteran not be able to complete the questionnaire, the Veteran's legal representative is interviewed. The questions were developed based on VAC's ten care outcome standards: Safety and Security, Food Quality, Access to Clinical Services, Medication Regime, Access to Spiritual Guidance, Socialization- Recreation, Activation and Ambulation, Personal Care, Sanitation and Access to Specialized Services. In the process of the interview, should the district staff member identify specific care issues, they will request that a district office health professional conduct a review.

In 2000-2001, interviews were conducted with 1,500 clients and/or their family members. A national satisfaction rate of 93% was achieved. This increased to 94% in 2001-2002, based on interviews with 2,200 clients and/or family members.

On May 9, 2003, the Royal Canadian Legion (RCL) was awarded a one-year contract, with a possible additional year renewal, for its trained members to conduct VAC's client satisfaction questionnaires with more than 4,000 Veterans residing in community care facilities across Canada. This will provide VAC with a broader picture of client satisfaction in community facilities.

As well, district office nurses conduct a facility questionnaire with the facility administrators to ensure programs and services offered meet Veterans care needs.

VAC strongly encourages all its PAB facilities to obtain their accreditation from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation (CCHSA). Accreditation is one component of VAC's Residential Care Strategy. Of our 4,310 PABs, 96% (representing 4,155 beds) are located in accredited facilities. VAC, in partnership with the RCL, has worked with the CCHSA to include VAC's ten care outcome standards into the CCHSA'S Achieving Improved Measurements (AIMs) accreditation process.

In April 2001, a Director of Quality Care position was created to monitor quality of care in the Ontario Region. The Director of Quality Care works closely with the three larger PAB facilities in Ontario: the Perley-Rideau Veterans' Health Care Centre, Parkwood Hospital, and Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre; and various stakeholders to resolve any outstanding issues. Consideration will be given for a further expansion of this type of role to other regions as required.

Furthermore, VAC encourages, and in some cases participates in, the work of various committees such as the Residents' Councils and attends meetings with Veterans and their families.

Every concern and complaint expressed to VAC's officials is investigated with the facility.

### **Recommendation 3**

**Veterans Affairs Canada explore with regional and provincial health authorities ways of standardizing as much as possible the gerontological assessment process used to determine the level of care required by Veterans seeking a place in a long-term care facility to reduce discrepancies from one region or province to another in terms of access.**

### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its partners to ensure that Veterans can access the care they require. The process for assessment for admission to long-term care for Veterans is standard. In order to be eligible for the federal long-term care programs, Veterans must be assessed as requiring Federal Level II or Federal Level III care standard. Federal Level II care indicates that the Veteran requires daily nursing and personal care and 90 to 150 minutes per day of supervision by a health professional, personal care and therapeutic services as well as assistance with the activities of daily living. Federal Level III care standard requires daily nursing and personal care, therapeutic services, approximately 150 minutes per day or more of supervision, personal care and therapeutic services and assistance with the activities of daily living. This assessment criteria is used nationally by VAC staff for program eligibility and in determining the priority of client admissions. The District Office Health Care Teams (DOHCT) base the priority of admission first on the assessment of the client's health needs; those with the greatest health needs are given first priority. When health assessments indicate that clients have similar health needs, the DOHCT will recommend that they be admitted in the following order of priority:

- 1) Veteran pensioners who need the care for a war-related pensioned condition;
- 2) income-qualified Veterans; and
- 3) overseas service Veterans and Veteran pensioners for care not related to war-related pensioned conditions.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that Veterans seeking access to a long-term care facility are not taken off the wait-list or sent to the bottom of the line if they refuse to accept a placement at a facility because it is not the one they requested or because they were given less than three days to agree to and move to the location offered to them.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that care is available to meet the health care needs of Veterans. As the policy for admission differs from province to province and between some Health Authorities within provinces, it is difficult to ensure that the preferred location is always available. However, the health care needs of the Veterans can be addressed or be assured either through services at home or an alternative bed placement with VAC funding assistance while the Veteran awaits the preferred location.

When Veterans are ready to consider admission, they can have their names placed on the admissions wait list.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Veterans Affairs Canada explore with regional and provincial health authorities ways to quickly identify Veterans among individuals seeking access to long-term care facilities, including a box on the application forms asking if the applicant is a Veteran, so that the onus will not be mostly on the Veterans themselves to determine what services they are entitled.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its provincial partner, in this case, Quebec, to resolve this matter. In June 2003, VAC contacted all provinces and was advised that all provinces but Quebec either have a Veteran self-identification block on the application, or an opportunity during the long-term care assessment process when applicants can self-identify as Veterans. VAC will work with Quebec to determine the most appropriate manner in which Veterans from this province can self-identify.

## **B. Conditions in Veterans Long-term Care Facilities**

### **Recommendation 6**

**Veterans Affairs Canada proceed as quickly as possible to help the Caribou Memorial Veterans' Pavilion, part of the Dr. Leonard A. Miller Centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, significantly improve its capacity to provide long-term care to its residents dealing with some form of dementia.**

#### **Response**

The Government is committed to ensuring that quality long-term care is available to meet the health care needs of Veterans. VAC agrees with this recommendation and negotiations with officials from the province and the facility are currently underway to address these issues.

### **Recommendation 7**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with the Caribou Pavilion, the Dr. Leonard A. Miller Centre and the Health Care Corporation of St. John's, ensure that in the process of increasing the Pavilion's dementia capabilities, the rooms with three or more residents are replaced by private or double-occupancy rooms without reducing the total number of priority access beds.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities to Veterans seriously. VAC agrees with this recommendation. It is expected that this issue will be addressed as part of the negotiations identified in response to Recommendation 6.

### **Recommendation 8**

**Veterans Affairs Canada establish clear accommodation standards to ensure that all major Veterans long-term facilities and, as much as possible, all other facilities with priority access beds for Veterans can provide private rooms or at least a mix of private and double-occupancy rooms for residents and meet the needs of female Veterans.**



## **Response**

Ensuring that quality long-term care is available to meet the health needs of Veterans remains a priority for the Government of Canada. The care needs of each Veteran are assessed and the most appropriate accommodation available is provided. With respect to the accommodation needs of female Veterans, as is the case for male Veterans, each situation is reviewed on a case by case basis.

Eighty percent of VAC's 4,310 PABs (or 3,475 PABs) are located in 21 facilities across Canada. Of these, 15 facilities offer private and/or semi-private accommodations while only six facilities offer three or more beds per room. Three of the six facilities, Caribou Memorial Veterans' Pavilion, NL, Ste. Anne's Hospital, QC and Mewburn Veterans Centre, AB, are or soon will be undergoing renovations that will eliminate the three or more beds per room situation.

## **Recommendation 9**

**Veterans Affairs Canada explore options such as alternative housing and enhanced home care to limit as much as possible the separation of couples and consider, on a case by case basis, providing some level of reimbursement to spouses of Veterans in long-term care facilities of the costs of transportation between their homes and the facilities.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to assisting its partners, in this case the RCL, in seeking alternative housing options for Veterans. VAC is working with the Dominion Command of the RCL to offer guidance and advice to Provincial Commands and Legion Branches on various property-related issues. This may include assistance in identifying, planning, developing or financing housing options for Veterans and other seniors. The project has also established a partnering relationship with the Abbeyfield Houses Society of Canada which specializes in providing supportive housing options.

## **Quality and Delivery of Meals**

### **Recommendation 10**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with the administrators of the facilities and regional and provincial health authorities, develop standards for the quality, preparation and delivery of meals in Veterans long-term care facilities to clearly indicate the level of quality and satisfaction that should be maintained.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its provincial partners where appropriate. VAC has access to expertise in this area and where possible, will bring about appropriate changes to the food service. In addition, VAC realizes that food services are a critical element of long-term care and as such VAC will follow the standards established as part of the accreditation process.

Based on VAC's ten care outcome standards which are incorporated in VAC's client satisfaction questionnaire, the Department measures Veterans satisfaction with the food services in the facility in which they reside. During the last survey year, the overall client satisfaction with food services was 78%. Although this rate of satisfaction is considered to be above average, additional improvements are required.

## **Recommendation 11**

**Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that the standards established pursuant to Recommendation 10 are met by monitoring on a regular basis the quality, preparation and presentation of meals provided in all Veterans long-term care facilities utilizing not only questionnaires asking the level of satisfaction of Veterans, but also regular inspections by departmental officials or, at the behest of the department, members of Veterans groups.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that quality long-term care is available to meet the health needs of Veterans. VAC has several mechanisms in place to assess Veterans' level of satisfaction as was described in the response to Recommendation 2. In the future, the monitoring of the levels of client satisfaction regarding food services will receive specific attention.

## **Recommendation 12**

**Veterans Affairs Canada undertake consultations with the administrators of facilities and regional and provincial health authorities to increase as quickly as possible the quality of the level of satisfaction with the meals served to Veterans at the Deer Lodge Centre in Winnipeg and the Caribou Veterans Memorial Pavilion in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its provincial partners, where appropriate. VAC will endeavour to make improvements to food services, in particular, at the two facilities identified. However, it should be noted that the Deer Lodge Centre issues reach further than the facility itself as it is part of the Winnipeg Regional Hospital Authority which introduced a centralized rethermalized food system which serves nine large facilities in Winnipeg.

## **Recommendation 13**

**In the development of standards for the quality, preparation and delivery of meals, pursuant to Recommendation 10, Veterans Affairs Canada should encourage all Veterans long-term care facilities to develop menus which occasionally feature regional recipes and special meals and which cater as much as possible to the eating habits and tastes of elderly individuals.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its provincial partners, where appropriate. When PAB facilities request VAC's assistance in the development of menus featuring regional recipes and special meals, where possible, VAC will make professional dietary assistance available.

As described in VAC's response to recommendation 25, progress made in this area will be reported.

## **Recommendation 14**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation and in agreement with facilities administrators and regional and provincial health authorities, develop guidelines for the construction or renovation of dining areas to ensure easy wheelchair accessibility, a more home-like atmosphere and improved security.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its partners, to ensure appropriate action is taken when requested. VAC agrees in part with this recommendation to ensure dining areas are wheelchair accessible and has already taken steps in several of the PAB sites to ensure wheelchair accessibility. In the remaining PAB sites, VAC will endeavour to implement this and other elements of the recommendation where requested by the facilities.

## **Recommendation 15**

**Veterans Affairs Canada continue to support, possibly in partnership with private enterprise, the reconstituted food program at Ste. Anne's Hospital designed to help individuals with chewing and swallowing difficulties with the aim of making such food available to all other Veterans long-term care facilities and possibly to non-Veterans centres as well.**

### **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities for Veterans seriously and is committed to ensuring that best practices developed by its only facility, Ste. Anne's Hospital, are shared with its provincial partners. VAC has, since 2000, been holding national long-term care meetings with its PAB facility staff members to share best care practices. Since 1993, Ste. Anne's Hospital has been providing dysphagic residents with a reconstituted food program. The reconstituted meals resemble their normal counterparts so closely that their modified texture is only apparent when tasted. In 1999, staff from Ste. Anne's Hospital undertook this food program and developed a private company called Prophage Inc. The project is still in the implementation stage. However, should the company advance into the working phase, they may be able to supply other facilities.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### **A. Identity**

## **Recommendation 16**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with the administrators of the Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre and the Veterans and Community Residents Council, explore ways to increase the profile of the Veterans community within the Sunnybrook campus, including more signboards.**

### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its partners, in this case, Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre, Veterans and the Residents Council, to ensure an appropriate resolution to the signage issue. Discussions between the residents council, SWCHSC management and VAC on this issue were being held earlier in 2003. In July 2003, VAC received a cost estimate and is proceeding with the implementation of increasing the number of signboards.

## **B. Consultations**

### **Recommendation 17**

**Veterans Affairs Canada establish clear guidelines for its representatives across the country so that they can monitor conditions in facilities providing long-term care to Veterans under contract with the department on a regular basis and in a consistent fashion.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada is steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that quality long-term care is available to meet the health needs of Veterans. As indicated in response to Recommendation 2, VAC has a number of mechanisms in place to monitor conditions in facilities providing long-term care to Veterans, under contract with the department, on a regular basis and in a consistent fashion. However, VAC is always seeking ways in which to enhance its monitoring and as a result, on May 9, 2003, the Royal Canadian Legion (RCL) was awarded a one year contract, with a possible additional year renewal. This contract will mean that trained RCL members will conduct VAC's client satisfaction questionnaires with approximately 4,000 Veterans residing in community care facilities across Canada. This information will further assist VAC in understanding and addressing Veterans' concerns.

### **Recommendation 18**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with all the parties involved, develop guidelines to govern consultations between the administrators of facilities providing long-term care to Veterans, councils of residents, including Veterans, and departmental officials to ensure that all Veterans long-term care facilities have a significant level of consultations and that the interests of residents dealing with some form of dementia or otherwise unable to speak for themselves are well served.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities and commitments to Veterans seriously. The Government is committed to working with its partners, in this case the PAB facilities, to ensure that an appropriate resolution of this issue is found. VAC agrees in part with this recommendation that consultations between residents and facility administration are important and will endeavour to ensure that a process to establish active residents councils is in place in all major PAB facilities.

Should the Veteran not be able to speak for himself or herself, there are provisions for staff to consult with the Veteran's official designated representative. The processes outlined in the response to Recommendation 2 would apply.

### **C. Security**

#### **Recommendation 19**

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with administrators of Veterans long-term care facilities, regional and provincial health authorities and councils of residents, review security policies to ensure the protection of residents and staff and to prevent the loss or theft of personal property.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its partners, in this case the PAB facilities, when requested, to ensure appropriate resolutions are found. VAC has access to Security Consultants and the Department can make this service available to facilities who have identified this as an issue, and who request assistance in dealing with the matter.

### **D. Music Therapy**

#### **Recommendation 20**

**Veterans Affairs Canada give a high priority to music therapy programs in Veterans long-term care facilities and cooperate with provincial and regional health authorities as well as with administrators of facilities to find ways to ensure adequate and steady funding for these valuable services.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada remains committed to ensuring quality long-term care is available to meet the health needs of Veterans. VAC agrees that therapy programs for Veterans in long-term care facilities is a priority and currently provides funding to facilities for special programming which includes music, arts and recreation. VAC may provide assistance to a specific request for music therapy where numbers warrant.

## **E. Spiritual Needs**

No recommendations identified.

### **Response**

The Government of Canada remains resolved to ensuring quality long-term care is available to meet the needs of Veterans. VAC recognizes the importance of making spiritual care services available to Veterans in long-term care facilities and will continue to support pastoral care when requested.

## **F. Canadian Forces Veterans**

### **Recommendation 21**

**Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that all Veterans long-term care facilities are kept up to date on departmental programs designed to assist Canadian Forces Veterans, including those dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome or other stress-related injuries, so that they can provide some guidance to new Veterans and help them find the help they need within their communities.**

### **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities to meeting the needs of Veterans seriously. As was noted in the background to Recommendation 21, Ste. Anne's Centre is able to help young Veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, progress is underway in the development of additional out patient clinics within our priority access bed facilities. Clinics in Winnipeg (Deer Lodge), London (Parkwood) and Quebec City (Maison Paul Triquet) are slated to open this fall. VAC will maintain its commitment to reaching out to former and current service personnel who need clinical support for PTSD by exploring opportunities to increase the number of clinics.

VAC has committed to developing mechanisms to provide information to all Veterans long-term care facilities across Canada regarding departmental programs designed to assist Canadian Forces Veterans.

## CONCLUSION

### Recommendation 22

**Veterans Affairs Canada, in cooperation with administrators of Veterans long-term care facilities, regional and provincial health authorities, and Federal Government officials, review the decision-making process concerning funding for renovations and equipment for Veterans long-term care facilities to reduce delays as much as possible.**

### Response

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities and commitments to Veterans seriously. The Government is resolved to working with its partners, in this case, the PAB facilities, to ensure timely resolution of requests for funding. As significant funding is often required, the Department must ensure that taxpayers dollars are spent in the most appropriate manner and therefore, requires requesting facilities to provide a business plan rationalizing their request. VAC will work with its stakeholders to ensure decisions are taken in a timely fashion.

### Recommendation 23

**Veterans Affairs Canada maintain its strong commitment to its Canada Remembers program and explore the possibility of providing more information in its community engagement and other activities aimed at young Canadians on the types of volunteer work which can be done in Veterans long-term care facilities.**

### Response

Canada has a proud history of recognizing and remembering the contributions of those who have served this country, in times of war and peace. VAC is strongly committed to ensuring that the achievements and sacrifices of all Veterans are appropriately remembered. To this end, *Canada Remembers* is finalizing its Youth Strategy: *Remembering our Past - Preserving our Future*. The VAC Youth Strategy includes measures to consult with Canadians about how they can participate in community-based youth Remembrance activities. It focusses on youth, educational, and community-based organizations to integrate Remembrance with other initiatives and interests that Canadians currently support. The recommendation to provide youth with information on VAC's community engagement, other activities and the types of volunteer work that can be done in Veterans long-term care facilities, will be addressed through the implementation of the following two elements of the Youth Strategy:



**Sustained Local Leadership:** By encouraging organizations to develop a local leadership role in supporting youth Remembrance projects, a broader opportunity will be provided to youth to be active in Remembrance, and understand its importance in Canadian society.

**Seniors/Youth Integration:** By integrating seniors and youth in a community setting, youth can better relate the causes and effects of military conflict to their own heritage and the heritage of the nation.

#### **Recommendation 24**

**Veterans Affairs Canada explore the possibility of establishing a new commendation program to salute the significant contribution made by a volunteer or a group of volunteers, including non-Veterans, to the quality of life of Veterans in long-term care facilities.**

#### **Response**

The Government of Canada is committed to working with its partners in recognizing the valuable contributions of individuals to the well-being of Veterans. In 2002, VAC developed the Minister of Veterans Affairs' Commendation Award. Though intended primarily for Veterans who have contributed in an exemplary way to the care and well-being of other Veterans or to the area of Remembrance, the award can also be extended to non-Veterans, and, indeed, already has been. The award acknowledges a broad range of contributions to the well-being of Veterans. Indeed, it has been observed that contributions of individuals to those in long-term care facilities are one of the more frequent citations amongst the awards given. While the criteria for the award departs slightly from the recommendation in that it can only be awarded to individuals, VAC is confident that the Minister's Commendation will stand as an important acknowledgment of the contributions of volunteers in the area of long-term care.

#### **Recommendation 25**

**Veterans Affairs Canada make a report on an annual basis on the progress made in dealing with the issues and problems raised concerning long-term care for Veterans and that the report be tabled in Parliament.**

## **Response**

The Government of Canada takes its responsibilities and commitments to Veterans seriously. Major accomplishments are highlighted in the Departmental Performance Report, an annual report tabled in Parliament in the fall of each year.

VAC recognizes the value in continual service improvement and in monitoring progress to ensure that desired results are achieved, and as such will commit to preparing an annual progress report in the long-term care area.

VAC also agrees to provide additional information to the Committee, on request, on progress in the area of long-term care.