



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **FAIRNESS IN THE SERVICES OFFERED TO FRANCOPHONE, WOMEN AND 2SLGBTQ+ VETERANS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**Emmanuel Dubourg, Chair**

**JUNE 2022  
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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VETERANS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on  
Veterans Affairs**

**Emmanuel Dubourg  
Chair**

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## **NOTICE TO READER**

### **Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons**

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.



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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

has the honour to present its

## **SEVENTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied fairness in the services offered to Veterans: francophones and anglophones, men and women, and the LGBTQ+ community and has agreed to report the following:





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# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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*As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.*

## **Recommendation 1**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada implement a process that prioritizes applications submitted in French, just as it successfully did for applications submitted by women. .... 10**

## **Recommendation 2**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada compile and make publicly available, in summary reports, disaggregated data by quarter on the processing time of first applications for disability benefits submitted in English, in French, by a male veteran and by a female veteran, as well as the number of applications submitted by each group per quarter. .... 10**

## **Recommendation 3**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada offer full-time permanent positions, instead of temporary ones, to employees responsible for processing disability benefit applications..... 10**

## **Recommendation 4**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada publish the average and median total wait time for first applications for disability benefits from the date the application is received to the date, in the case of a favourable decision, payment is issued, or, in the case of an unfavourable decision, the date the decision is communicated to the Veteran..... 10**

## **Recommendation 5**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada implement in their entirety the recommendations listed in the Auditor General’s 2022 Report 2—Processing Disability Benefits for Veterans. .... 10**

**Recommendation 6**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada expand and enhance the Office of Women and 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans to better identify and address systemic issues and continue holding annual Women Veterans Forums to bring together Veterans, researchers, experts and organizational leaders to discuss specific challenges women and how Veterans Affairs Canada can continue to improve supports and services tailored to these Veterans. .... 15**

**Recommendation 7**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada provide all its employees with training on the LGBT purge in order to educate them about the unique trauma experienced by Veterans who were victims of this institutional discrimination. .... 18**

**Recommendation 8**

**That the Department of National Defence modify the DND 1209 self-identification form to add a question asking members whether they belong to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. .... 19**

**Recommendation 9**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada allow 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans to self-identify through its life after service surveys and other data collection tools..... 19**

**Recommendation 10**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada create liaison officer positions responsible for regularly following up on benefit applications and overseeing the work of case managers to implement application processing plans for Veterans with more complex needs. .... 20**

**Recommendation 11**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) prioritize the use of a detailed checklist— developed through consultation with Veterans—to be used at the time of intake (such as VAC’s Benefits Navigator); and that VAC make a concerted effort to prioritize personal connections with Veterans, especially those who do not have a case manager and often call for service but never reach the same person twice or are redirected to a website..... 21**



# FAIRNESS IN THE SERVICES OFFERED TO FRANCOPHONE, WOMEN AND 2SLGBTQ+ VETERANS

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## INTRODUCTION

In a September 2018 report entitled [\*Meeting Expectations: Timely and Transparent Decisions for Canada's Ill and Injured Veterans\*](#), the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman found that francophone and women Veterans “wait longer than others and that these differences appear to be arbitrary and not based on a difference in needs” (p. 13). The Committee briefly studied these issues in its [\*report on the backlog of disability benefit applications\*](#). The report includes findings from the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and responses from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and other organizations and recommends “[t]hat Veterans Affairs Canada increase its hiring efforts for bilingual and francophone adjudicators, across Canada including Quebec,” and that the department “develop a plan to address the anticipated increase in the number of women veterans in the coming years.”

In its [\*response tabled in the House on 25 March 2021\*](#), the department pledged to hire more French-speaking employees and create a unit to focus on processing French applications. VAC also designated one specific manager to monitor completion times for applications from francophone and women Veterans. The Committee wanted to follow up on these measures and broaden their scope to include 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans.

The first part of this report relays the findings of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman’s study and presents the available data on the backlog of disability benefit applications submitted by francophones. The second part discusses the unfair treatment that can result from a lack of knowledge about the unique nature of injuries sustained by women during their military service, in addition to initiatives taken by VAC to recognize the consequences of sexual trauma in the military. The third part sets out the obstacles that 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans must overcome, as well as the efforts that must be made to raise greater awareness among VAC staff about the consequences of 2SLGBTQ+ purges.

Fourteen witnesses appeared as part of the three meetings dedicated to this study. The Committee sincerely thanks each witness for their contribution.



## BACKLOG OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED IN FRENCH

In its September 2018 report entitled *[Meeting Expectations: Timely and Transparent Decisions for Canada's Ill and Injured Veterans](#)*, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman analyzed a randomized sample of 300 applications completed in 2016–2017. The results reveal that the wait time for decisions related to applications submitted in French was 45 weeks on average, compared to an average of 24 weeks for applications submitted in English. In addition, an analysis of the median timeframes (50% of files have a longer turnaround and 50% have a shorter one) for both types of applications revealed that most French-language applications took over 48 weeks to process, in comparison with 20 weeks for most English-language ones.

VAC responded with its own analysis of all completed first applications from 2016–2017, which shows a smaller difference in turnaround times: 28 weeks on average for francophones versus 21 weeks for anglophones, with a median of 26 weeks for francophones versus 18 for anglophones.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2020, Steven Harris, Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, VAC, said that “parity between English and French speakers should be achieved by the end of 2021.”<sup>2</sup> This expected improvement is due to the fact that “nearly 28% of [VAC’s] decision-making staff are either native French speakers or bilingual. That includes recent hires, and [VAC is] still hiring.”<sup>3</sup>

In its [response tabled in the House on 25 March 2021](#), the department pledged to:

- a) ensure that 25% of new staff hired is francophone or bilingual;
- b) create a bilingual unit to focus on processing French applications; and
- c) hire a workload management manager to more closely monitor completion times for francophone applications.

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1 Veterans Ombudsman, *Meeting Expectations: Timely and Transparent Decisions for Canada's Ill and Injured Veterans*, September 2018, p. 15, note 12.

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA), *Evidence*, 27 October 2020, 1620, Mr. Steven Harris (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs).

3 Ibid.

According to a document submitted by the department to the Committee in February 2022 (see Appendix A, Minister’s Response to the Committee, February 2022),<sup>4</sup> the gap between the wait times for French and English applications has almost entirely closed. It shows that between 1 April and 31 December 2021, the average processing time for anglophones was 32.2 weeks (21 in 2016–2017), versus 40.5 weeks for francophones (28 in 2016–2017). In her appearance before the Committee, Ms. Meunier, from VAC, said that “as of December 2021, [VAC has] reduced ... the average turnaround time for francophones by 3.2 weeks.”<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, this trend toward fairness was made possible because of an overall increase in wait times of roughly 12 weeks between March 2017 and December 2021, regardless of whether applications were submitted in English or French. In other words, the significant expansion of VAC’s backlog between 2017 and 2021 narrowed the gap between wait times for applications submitted in English and French.

However, this data, which is at first glance encouraging, is difficult to square with other data published in the [Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report](#)<sup>6</sup>. In this report, the department said that in the quarter between 1 July and 30 September 2021, the average processing time for English applications was 42.4 weeks, in comparison with 59.8 weeks for French ones. This means that in that quarter alone, wait times were 31.7% longer (+10.2 weeks) for anglophones and 47.6% longer (+19.3 weeks) for francophones than the average times for the first three quarters of 2021.

Furthermore, an analysis of median, as opposed to average, wait times in the quarter between 1 July and 30 September 2021 shows a wider gap of 55.6 weeks: median turnaround was 20.4 weeks for anglophones and 76 for francophones.

This concerning data reveals how difficult it is to follow evolving data trends, because statistics are published sporadically and focus on different periods of time. That is why,

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4 “Response to a question asked by Mr. Désilets at the 1 February 2022 meeting,” document submitted to ACVA.

5 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1305 (Ms. Amy Meunier, Director General, Centralized Operations Division, Department of Veterans Affairs).

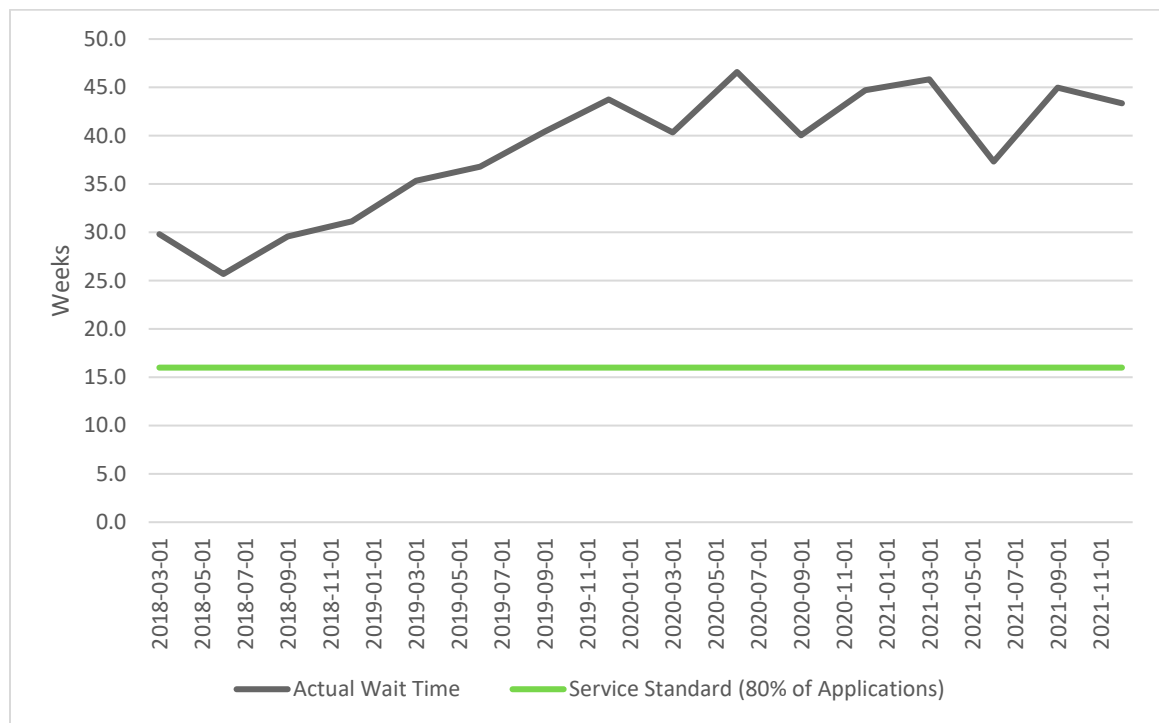
6 This report is published after each quarter and presents statistics on the processing of disability claims. This allows the progression of the number of claims received, the average waiting time and the number of decisions issued to be accurately monitored. This information is very useful when addressing the issue of backlogs in a comprehensive way. Specifically, with regard to processing of cases by language, gender or nature of service, the information is presented differently from quarter to quarter, making it impossible to compare to previous quarters. For example, the most recently published data for the quarter ending 31 March 2022 presents data by language and gender only for this last quarter. Previous reports are no longer on the site once a new one has been published, making it impossible to track both setbacks and improvements.





on 25 March 2022, the Committee wrote to the Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs, asking him to provide the disaggregated quarterly data on processing times for applications submitted in French and English, as well as applications submitted by men and women Veterans (see Appendix B), since 2018.

**Figure 1—Average Wait Time for a Disability Benefit First Application Decision**



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, data compiled by the Library of Parliament.

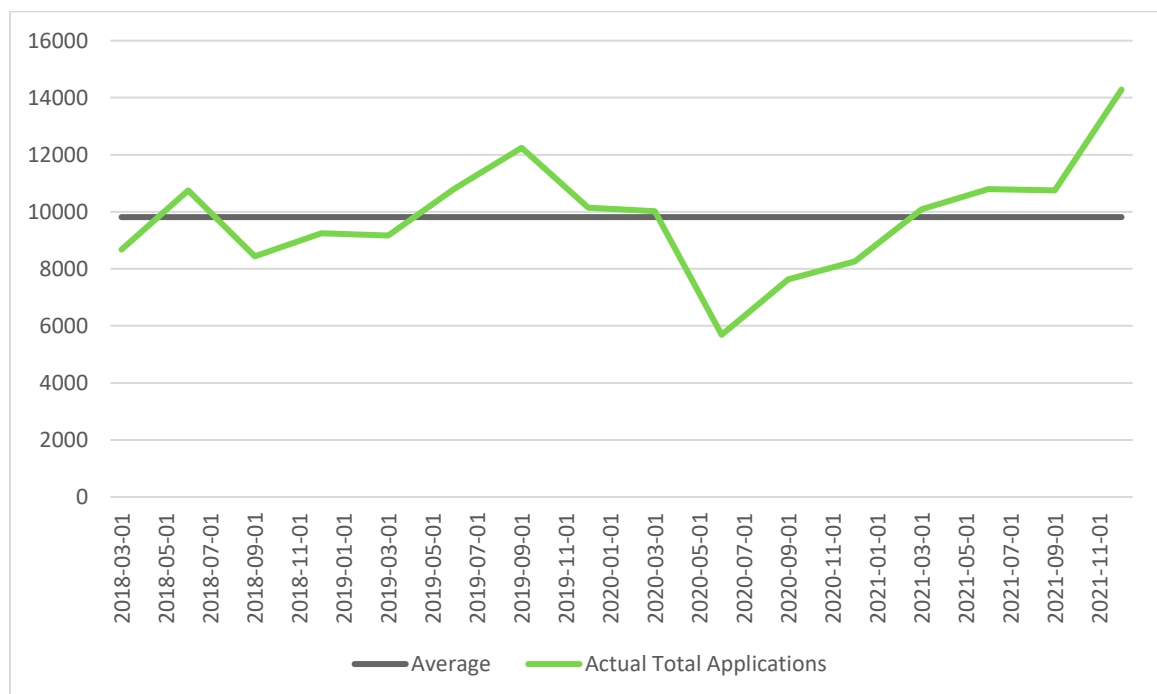
This data confirms the increase in the average wait times since 2018 for all applications and show that these times became more stable as of the first quarter of 2020.<sup>7</sup> The department’s service standard is 16 weeks for 80% of requests, but the average wait time stabilized between 40 and 45 weeks during the two years of the pandemic.

When the Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs, appeared before the Committee, he said that the number of backlogged applications was 11,000, down from

<sup>7</sup> While raw data is unavailable, this graph presents the disability benefit first application decisions since 2018, with the average wait time calculated based on the relative weight of each category in the department’s tables.

23,000 a few years prior.<sup>8</sup> Given that wait times did not decrease in two years, questions arise about how the backlog was reduced. Two main factors could explain this: the significant increase in the number of decisions made in 2021, and the 50% reduction in the number of applications received in the first year of the pandemic (which however soared in late 2021). It will now be interesting to see whether VAC is able to efficiently process this large influx of applications.

**Figure 2—New Disability Benefit Applications by Quarter**



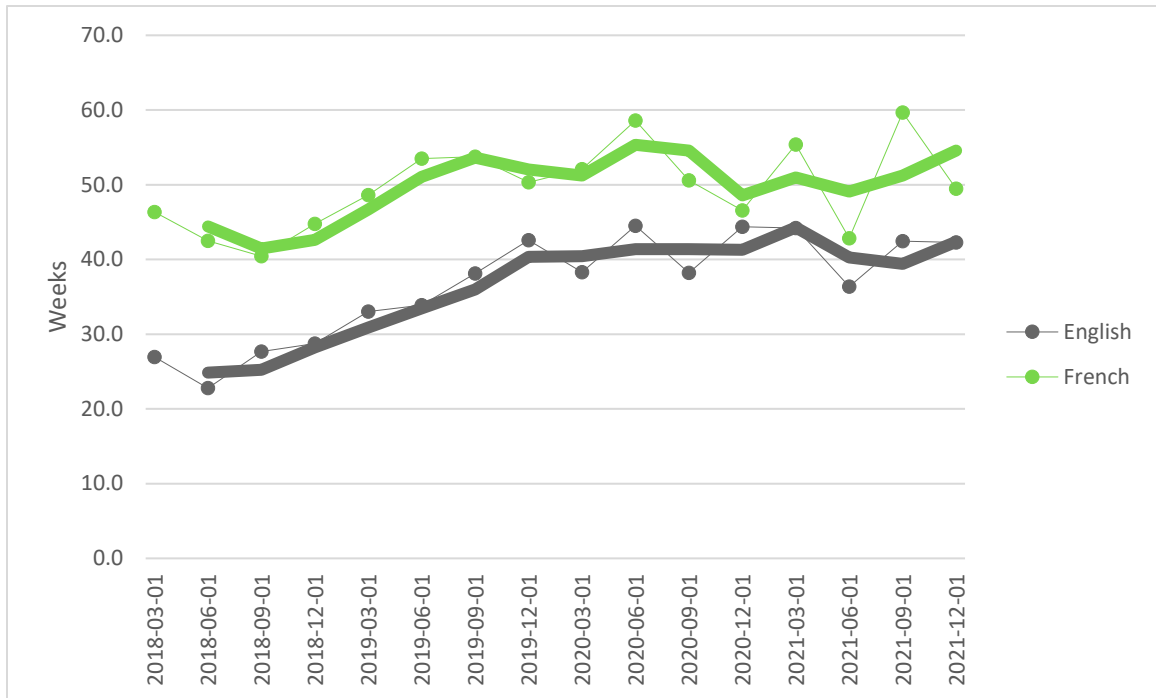
Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, data compiled by the Library of Parliament.

Data provided by VAC show that the wait times increased, both for applications submitted in English and in French.

8 ACVA, *Evidence*, 6 May 2022, 1300 (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs).



**Figure 3—Wait Time by Language for Disability Benefit First Applications**



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, data compiled by the Library of Parliament.

Approximately 15% of all applications are submitted in French. Barring a brief period in late 2020, where the gap between English and French applications significantly narrowed but rebounded afterward, since late 2019, French applications have taken 15 weeks more than English ones on average to be adjudicated.

Debbie Lowther, from VETS Canada, an organization that helps homeless and at-risk Veterans, said that francophones outside Quebec have a very difficult time receiving services in French.<sup>9</sup> Ms. Lowther said that this forces them to communicate with their case managers in English: “[w]hen veterans are in a stressful situation, not being able to receive support in the language of their choice just adds to the stress.”<sup>10</sup>

The problem has become so severe that Veterans are sometimes advised to submit their applications in English in order to receive a faster response. Brigitte Laverdure, who introduces herself as a peer helper for Canadian Armed Forces LGBTQ Veterans, said that

9 ACVA, *Evidence*, 29 March 2022, 1850 (Ms. Debbie Lowther, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, VETS Canada).

10 *Ibid.*, 1940.

there were reports of this recommendation coming straight from VAC employees.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, she put that supposed rumour to the test:

Last spring, I helped a veteran who lived close to the Outaouais-Ontario border. I asked him if he had any objections to us making his application in English so I could test the system. He replied that he had no problem with it. He received a positive response in less than seven weeks. He received a reply in less than seven weeks, whereas we wait for years. This is the case for me, personally, and also for my spouse.<sup>12</sup>

Ms. Laverdure did however say that there are now shorter wait times for decisions related to mental health problems.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to find one specific reason for these delays. Ms. Meunier said that “[VAC has] close to 200 bilingual or French-essential individuals. I can’t give you the precise number, but I would say that it’s around 40 to 45 French-essential positions. ... [T]he majority would be in Quebec: in Quebec City and Saint-Jean, as well as Montreal.”<sup>14</sup> This number seems low considering VAC’s 3,500 full-time equivalents, but it is not clear whether Ms. Meunier was referring to VAC’s total staff or just to the number of positions dedicated to working on disability benefit applications.

In addition, bilingual employees must be staffed in positions that are likely to positively impact processing delays. As Ms. Meunier stressed, “[VAC] can’t rely solely on bilingual people. [VAC] need[s] nurses and other people who make the decisions and are truly proficient in French and comfortable with the medical terms.”<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, the department must take into consideration applications that are submitted in English but may include numerous French documents depending on where the applicants were posted.<sup>16</sup>

There is hope that the funding earmarked in 2022–2023 for maintaining 168 temporary full-time positions at VAC will help to reduce these delays,<sup>17</sup> but current statistical trends seem to show that despite the department’s efforts, the situation is not improving. This was confirmed by the [Auditor General's analysis](#), which reached similar conclusions to

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11 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 1925 (Ms. Brigitte Laverdure, as an Individual).

12 *Ibid.*, 1905.

13 *Ibid.*, 2000.

14 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1310 (Meunier).

15 *Ibid.*, 1320 (Harris).

16 *Ibid.*, 1325 (Meunier).

17 *Ibid.*, 1310.



those presented in this report. As outlined in the next part of this report, priority processing for applications submitted by women led to an overall decrease in wait times; now, women do not wait any longer than men for adjudication. Given the vigorous efforts needed to close the significant gap between wait times for French and English applications, the Committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 1**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada implement a process that prioritizes applications submitted in French, just as it successfully did for applications submitted by women.**

#### **Recommendation 2**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada compile and make publicly available, in summary reports, disaggregated data by quarter on the processing time of first applications for disability benefits submitted in English, in French, by a male veteran and by a female veteran, as well as the number of applications submitted by each group per quarter.**

#### **Recommendation 3**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada offer full-time permanent positions, instead of temporary ones, to employees responsible for processing disability benefit applications.**

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada publish the average and median total wait time for first applications for disability benefits from the date the application is received to the date, in the case of a favourable decision, payment is issued, or, in the case of an unfavourable decision, the date the decision is communicated to the Veteran.**

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada implement in their entirety the recommendations listed in the Auditor General’s 2022 Report 2—Processing Disability Benefits for Veterans.**

### **FAIRNESS IN SERVICES TO WOMEN**

According to the [Office of the Veterans Ombudsman’s 2018 study](#), processing times for applications from women were longer than those from men. The gap was not as wide as the one between francophones and anglophones but remained significant: “[f]emale clients in our sample waited on average 32 weeks—3.6 weeks longer than male clients

who waited 28 weeks on average. The median time to issue a decision was 23 weeks for male clients and 31 weeks for female clients—a difference of eight weeks.” (p. 17) The study had a small sample, but the department’s exhaustive analysis in response to the report showed the same results.

Statistics from the last quarter of 2021 show a gap of 2.5 weeks in average wait times between men and women. In comparison, women waited on average 32 weeks in 2017, while men waited 28; in 2021, this increased to 41.3 weeks and 43.8 weeks, respectively, during the period from October to December 2021 according to the Ombudsman.

In her appearance before the Committee, Amy Meunier, from VAC, said that “as of December 2021, [VAC] reduced the average turnaround time for female applicants by 6.9 weeks”<sup>18</sup> thanks to a team that exclusively worked on applications by women.

Data regarding median wait times confirm these results. Contrary to the gap between francophones and anglophones, the gap between women and men closed entirely and even became inverted, with median data now showing that men actually wait eight weeks longer than women for adjudication. Between October and December 2021, the median wait time was 33 weeks for men and 25.6 weeks for women.

Therefore, it is no longer possible to say that “francophone women wait the longest,”<sup>19</sup> as relayed by Sayward Montague, from the National Association of Federal Retirees, referring to earlier data.

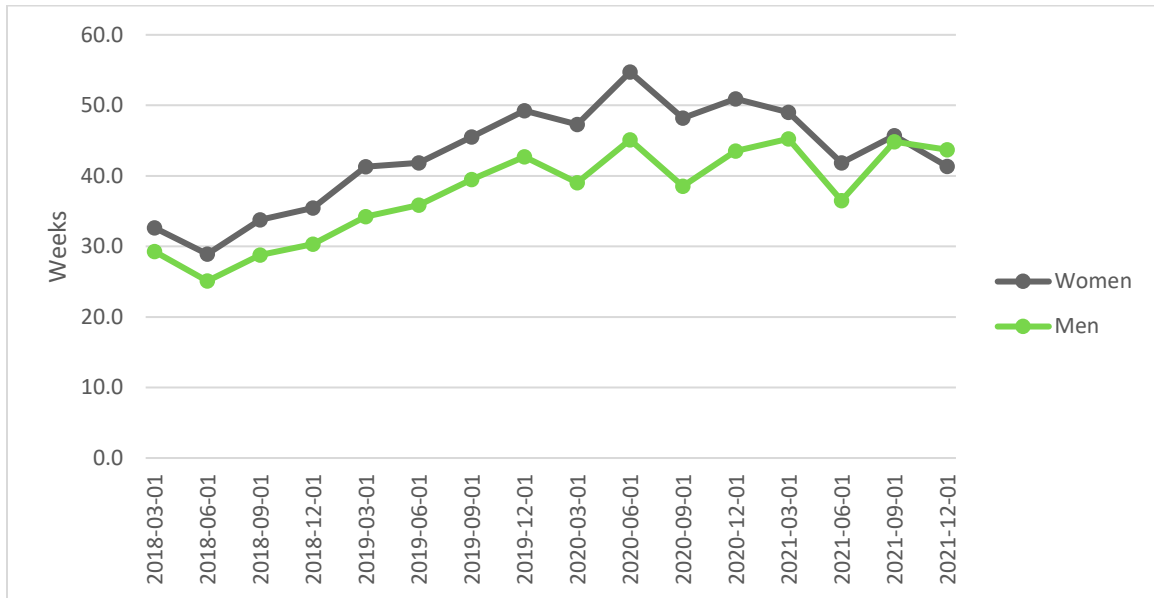
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18 Ibid., 1305.

19 ACVA, *Evidence*, 29 March 2022, 1855 (Ms. Sayward Montague, Director, Advocacy, National Association of Federal Retirees).



**Figure 4—Average Wait Time by Gender for Disability Benefit First Applications**



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, data compiled by the Library of Parliament.

In early 2018, approximately 15% of applications were made by women; now, this has increased to almost 20%. In that sense, the department’s efforts to prioritize these applications seem to have paid off.

There are, however, lingering concerns about certain health problems that seem to specifically affect women more than men. In his 2020 appearance before the Committee, Michel Doiron, former VAC assistant deputy minister, service delivery, said:

The cases [involving women veterans] are more complex. I won’t go through all of them, but I’ll give you one example. Last week, I was at a briefing, and it came as a surprise to hear that there were cases involving impacts on reproductive organs. Men can experience those problems as well. For instance, it’s pretty clear how post-traumatic stress syndrome could lead to impotence. Women, however, are affected differently, and those effects aren’t well known.<sup>20</sup>

In order to ensure that health problems affecting women are not eclipsed by the fact that women account for only 12% of Veterans—yet are responsible for 20% of new

20 ACVA, *Evidence*, 27 February 2020, 1020 (Mr. Michel Doiron).



applications—the Committee recommended that VAC “develop a plan to address the anticipated increase in the number of women Veterans in the coming years.”

In its [response](#), VAC said that “[g]iven that the overwhelming majority of VAC clients—approximately 88%—are male there is less available research on the impacts of service on females. As such, a deliberate research effort is warranted.” During his appearance, Paul Ledwell, explained that the [Table of Disabilities](#) was one of the barriers faced by women for fair treatment of health problems. VAC assessors are required to use the Table to determine the degree of impairment for injuries and diseases potentially resulting from military service. “We have a legacy issue with the table of disabilities, as much of it was established during a time when the overwhelming majority of those who had served were male. We’re modernizing that table to make sure it truly reflects the needs of all veterans, especially female veterans.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Sandra Perron, founder of The Pepper Pod, a retreat for women Veterans in Chelsea, Quebec, VAC has improved its services,<sup>22</sup> but it remains more difficult for women to prove that their health problems are related to military service.

I’m here to tell you that when you wear equipment that was designed for men with the weight bearing on the shoulders instead of the hips, that will injure your back over a long time. It’s the same with the boots that didn’t fit and the other pieces of equipment, such as frag vests that weren’t designed for women’s breasts. I’m here to tell you let’s do better with regard to these applications<sup>23</sup>.

Oliver Thorne, from the Veterans Transition Network, an organization that each year provides intensive counselling to roughly 200 Veterans with mental health problems across Canada, more than a quarter of whom are women, believes it is important to gain a better understanding of how military service affects the mental health of women and 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans.<sup>24</sup>

There is a difference with an injury caused by the institution. For example, we can look at military sexual trauma, which, in our women’s programs, is typically the central topic discussed when people are talking about their barrier to transition and their traumatic injuries. Often, those injuries, those traumas, have been caused and perpetrated by

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21 ACVA, *Evidence*, 6 May 2022, 1345 (Mr. Paul Ledwell, Deputy Minister, Department of Veterans Affairs).

22 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 1915 (Ms. Sandra Perron, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, The Pepper Pod).

23 *Ibid.*, 1845.

24 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1415 (Mr. Oliver Thorne, Executive Director, Veterans Transition Network).



individuals who are within the organization and are in a position of higher rank or oversight.

...

The injury that it causes can truly fracture somebody's sense of trust and ability to trust in institutions like the Canadian forces and the government. That then directly results in how a traumatic injury manifests itself, the types of symptoms they display and also how we might help somebody through that. Also, as I mentioned, it's about how they seek help.<sup>25</sup>

Sexual trauma in the military is therefore a key issue when assessing VAC's work with women Veterans. In its [June 2017 report](#) on mental health, the Committee briefly addressed this issue in response to testimony by Marie-Claude Gagnon, from the advocacy organization "It's Just 700". Ms. Gagnon was pleased with VAC's improved processing of sexual trauma claims.

[The department is] starting to accept the fact that military sexual trauma can be a case. Also, if the act happened, let's say, after work, but you get repercussions at work and you have proof of that, these cases can also be considered. Before, if the act happened, say, at a mess dinner, then you were not covered. Now they are starting to look into whether they should cover people in mandatory mess dinners at night and people who got assaulted in the barracks. Right now they aren't. Those things are being reviewed.<sup>26</sup>

At the time, the Committee recommended that VAC "conduct an evaluation of the response process and support services available to victims of military sexual trauma, and make available any training necessary in military sexual trauma." Since then, VAC has implemented priority processing for these files. According to Amy Meunier:

We have a dedicated unit that prioritized and processed over a thousand applications from military sexual trauma survivors. More than \$105 million in pain and suffering compensation has been paid to them. We were able to make those decisions within 30 days on average.<sup>27</sup>

Witnesses, including Ms. Laverdure, also noted this improvement.<sup>28</sup> Ever since the Office of Women and 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans was established, there have been better communications between women and 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans and the department. For example, Ms. Douglas, Executive Director of the LGBT Purge Fund, said that "the

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25 Ibid., 1430.

26 ACVA, *Evidence*, 6 February 2017, 1605 (Ms. Marie-Claude Gagnon, Founder, It's Just 700).

27 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1305 (Meunier).

28 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 2000 (Laverdure).

organization and the office [are] highly motivated to improve and they're doing quite a good job. [The LGBT Purge Fund] can go to them with specific cases if [it] needs to, and I'm grateful they exist."<sup>29</sup>

## Recommendation 6

**That Veterans Affairs Canada expand and enhance the Office of Women and 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans to better identify and address systemic issues and continue holding annual Women Veterans Forums to bring together Veterans, researchers, experts and organizational leaders to discuss specific challenges women and how Veterans Affairs Canada can continue to improve supports and services tailored to these Veterans.**

## 2SLGBTQ+ PURGE

**“I swallowed all of that. ... To protect myself, I had to swallow everything.<sup>30</sup> I've spent last 13 years ... explaining who I am.”<sup>31</sup>**

Nina Usherwood, transgender veteran with 42 years of military service

Starting in the 1950s, the federal government systematically and deliberately prevented 2SLGBTQ+ people from working in some government sectors. This was particularly true in the Canadian Armed Forces, but this policy was also applied to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the public service. Thousands were directly targeted by investigations, transfers, disciplinary measures, intimidation and dismissal. Despite the fact that homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees equality rights under section 15, was adopted in April 1985, these measures carried on until the mid-1990s.

The Canadian Armed Forces' 19–20 order entitled [Homosexuality—Sexual Abnormality Investigation](#) was revoked on 27 October 1992 following a Federal Court decision. Former chief of the defence staff General John de Chastelain wrote the following in a [memorandum](#):

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29 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 2010 (Ms. Michelle Douglas, Executive Director, LGBT Purge Fund).

30 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 1850 (Sergeant Nina Charlene Usherwood, as an Individual).

31 *Ibid.*, 1900.



The Federal Court of Canada—Trial Division declared that policies restricting the service of homosexuals in the CF are contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Therefore, [Canadian Forces Administrative Order] 19–20 and all interim policies under that order are revoked immediately.

While this decision may be difficult for some members of the CF to accept, I wish you all to understand that revocation of the homosexual policy has my full support.

On 13 March 2017, Veterans Todd Edward Ross, Martine Roy and Alida Satalic filed an omnibus class action lawsuit, which merged their three respective lawsuits filed in 2016, on behalf of everyone affected by these policies, collectively referred to as the LGBT Purge. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered an official apology on 28 November 2017, and the Federal Court approved the [final settlement agreement](#) on 22 June 2018, which included a maximum envelope of \$110 million in compensation. The agreement provided for three different compensation payments: (1) \$5,000 or (2) \$25,000 for investigations or disciplinary measures (based on intensity), and (3) \$50,000 for discharge or termination. In total, 719 class members received compensation under the agreement: 629 Veterans, 78 public servants and 12 Royal Canadian Mounted Police members.

Furthermore, a \$15 million fund was established for the activities of the Reconciliation and Memorialization Measures Panel, which is now known as the LGBT Purge Fund. Resources from the Fund will go toward running an exhibit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and building a national monument to memorialize the historical discrimination experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians.

Michelle Douglas is the current director of the Fund. She joined the CAF in 1986 but was discharged in 1989 because she was “not advantageously employable due to homosexuality.”<sup>32</sup> Ms. Douglas took the CAF to court, which eventually led it to revoke its order on homosexuality in 1992. During her appearance before the Committee, she spoke about how important it is to listen to the tragic stories of purge victims:

We know that the LGBT purge had a devastating effect on some estimated 9,000 Canadians, people who were trying to serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces, public service and the RCMP. These folks were giving their all, and in some cases their lives, to serve Canadians and Canada, and yet they were treated horribly by the state. I think we’re doing everything we can to try to tell these stories.

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32      *Ibid.*, 1840 (Douglas).

...

We're going to tell that story through the national monument and through an exhibit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and in some ways take off a little bit of the veneer that everything was okay. It wasn't okay, and we have to tell those hard stories.<sup>33</sup>

Ms. Douglas argued that it was necessary for all VAC employees to receive mandatory training on the consequences of the purge, particularly for case managers who coordinate care for Veterans who have undergone severe trauma: “[i]f a case manager has training from which they understand what something like the LGBT purge was all about, what they may have experienced, or other kinds of discrimination and, frankly, oppression that was literally on the books of the Canadian government, that goes a long way to acknowledging the history of what someone’s been through.”<sup>34</sup>

This training would help limit the number of miserable experiences that Ms. Douglas told the Committee about: “I’ve heard in a number of cases when that first initial phone call did not go well. There was doubt, or even mocking in a couple of cases. They never called Veterans Affairs again. They felt so humiliated and ashamed, and it was retraumatizing.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite some of the challenges the department has faced, it is important to stress that VAC is making efforts to modify its intake procedures:

through our experience with the Purge class action, we worked very closely with many survivors of that, and through that process we gleaned quite a bit about what we could change to be a much more effective trauma-informed organization. We have already implemented trauma-informed training for all of our decision-makers and frontline staff, and that will continue<sup>36</sup>.

Todd Ross was one of the three plaintiffs in the LGBTQ Purge class action lawsuit. He founded Rainbow Veterans of Canada in order to give 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans an organization that they could turn to for help. Mr. Ross congratulated the department’s progress:

Purge survivors tend to be older, with high rates of mental health challenges. With years of experiencing homophobia and transphobia in society, many of us avoided Veterans

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33 Ibid., 2005.

34 Ibid., 1850.

35 Ibid., 1930.

36 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1330 (Meunier).



Affairs, because we did not feel that we could trust VAC, and there was a fear of not being safe, but we have seen a dramatic change in recent years.

Veterans Affairs created a dedicated 1-800 number and dedicated staff for 2SLGBTQ+ veterans around the same time as the apology in the House of Commons. We have witnessed great work from VAC since the apology. We have noted the leadership of the minister to work with 2SLGBTQ+ veterans, and we greatly appreciate the work of the new directorate for women and 2SLGBTQ+ veterans. These efforts are removing many of the roadblocks to services that had previously existed.<sup>37</sup>

Mr. Ross echoed Ms. Douglas's concerns about the importance of training VAC staff so that they can be more aware of the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans. Incidentally, Rainbow Veterans of Canada helped organize a training course offered to several hundred department officials.<sup>38</sup> Based on this testimony, the Committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada provide all its employees with training on the LGBT purge in order to educate them about the unique trauma experienced by Veterans who were victims of this institutional discrimination.**

Sergeant Nina Charlene Usherwood, a transgender veteran with 42 years of service in the CAF, spoke about the tragic, long-lasting consequences of exclusionary policies on 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans' mental and physical health:

It's not one thing. It's just the fact that it never stops. As a panel member who was here once mentioned to me, it's the endless pinpricks, the endless, endless.... It's not any one big thing. It's just that it's endless, and that's the trauma I'm dealing with right now.<sup>39</sup>

Ms. Usherwood will be medically released next August. Despite the repeal of these formal discriminatory policies, transgender Veterans face certain bureaucratic irritants that act as obstacles during their transition:

When I log into My VAC Account, it pulls up my old file with my old name and gender. My medical records do not use that name or gender. It took a number of phone calls, secure messages and two uploads of my legal documents to get my name and gender

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37 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1410 (Mr. Todd Ross, Co-Chair, Rainbow Veterans of Canada).

38 *Ibid.*, 1440.

39 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 1910 (Usherwood).

corrected at VAC to match my legal name and gender. Each time, I had to explain to a new person at Veterans Affairs why my name and gender were incorrect.<sup>40</sup>

One reason for this is the DND 1209 self-identification form, which allows serving CAF members to declare whether they are Indigenous, members of a visible minority or persons with disabilities. However, the form has no option for 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans to declare their identity. According to Ms. Usherwood, “[t]he military has no idea how many members are 2SLGBTQ+. Likewise, Veterans Affairs has no idea how many veterans are 2SLGBTQ+.”<sup>41</sup> Mr. Harris, from VAC, confirmed that the department does not collect information on 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans and that the Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans has to make do with testimonials from advocacy groups.<sup>42</sup> Considering the importance for both the CAF and VAC to be aware of the number of 2SLGBTQ+ active service members and Veterans, the Committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That the Department of National Defence modify the DND 1209 self-identification form to add a question asking members whether they belong to the 2SLGBTQ+ community.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada allow 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans to self-identify through its life after service surveys and other data collection tools.**

### **A MORE PERSONALIZED FOLLOW-UP OF APPLICATIONS**

Ms. Laverdure suggested that VAC create liaison officer positions whose primary duty will be to follow up with Veterans regarding their applications. This suggestion was inspired by difficulties experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans, but it could be useful for the department’s entire client base. According to Ms. Laverdure:

These officers would be called upon to contact the veteran to inform them of the status of the file. That would be the least the department could do, and veterans would feel less left to their own devices. Case managers certainly can’t see everything; they don’t make decisions about applications.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Ibid., 1835.

41 Ibid.

42 ACVA, *Evidence*, 4 March 2022, 1355 (Harris).

43 ACVA, *Evidence*, 22 March 2022, 1945 (Laverdure).





The proposal would first apply to an initial group of some 15,000 Veterans (of VAC's 120,000 total clients) whose services are coordinated by case managers because those clients have complex needs.<sup>44</sup> Small teams within each district office could be formed and tasked with maintaining communication channels with Veterans, and department officials could even travel if needed.<sup>45</sup>

Mr. Harris, Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, said he was open to this kind of initiative:

I think the officers currently working in veteran services already play that role to some degree. It may not be as defined as the liaison officer role you described, but I think this kind of role exists in various areas in the department. We are always on the lookout for any new idea that could help us support veterans and offer them the best possible service. If there is another way of providing services, we would like to consider it.<sup>46</sup>

As Ms. Lowther said:

Often case managers and veteran service agents, VSAs, are very helpful and forthcoming with information on the benefits and services available to veterans. Still, there are times when, if the veteran doesn't ask the right questions, they don't know what they are entitled to. Veterans who are in crisis, perhaps struggling with mental health issues, facing homelessness or maybe even already homeless aren't usually in the right frame of mind to navigate the process of applying for benefits, especially if they don't even know what those benefits are<sup>47</sup>.

In an effort to promote any initiative that could improve communication channels between Veterans and VAC, particularly given the long wait times, the Committee recommends:

### **Recommendation 10**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada create liaison officer positions responsible for regularly following up on benefit applications and overseeing the work of case managers to implement application processing plans for Veterans with more complex needs.**

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44 Ibid., 2015.

45 Ibid., 2025.

46 ACVA, *Evidence*, 6 May 2022, 1525 (Harris).

47 ACVA, *Evidence*, 29 March 2022, 1850 (Lowther).

## **Recommendation 11**

**That Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) prioritize the use of a detailed checklist—developed through consultation with Veterans—to be used at the time of intake (such as VAC’s Benefits Navigator); and that VAC make a concerted effort to prioritize personal connections with Veterans, especially those who do not have a case manager and often call for service but never reach the same person twice or are redirected to a website.**

## **CONCLUSION**

Three important lessons can be drawn from the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman’s work. First, that inequities only emerge when we try to uncover them; second, the situation of women Veterans has shown that strong interventions can address these inequities; and third, as a result, it is impossible to act consistently if we do not have the information to do so, a situation that prevails in the case of 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans.

The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman identified waiting time for adjudication regarding benefit applications as its number one source of dissatisfaction with the department. In response, VAC made this issue its top priority. Benefit decisions can significantly impact Veterans for the rest of their lives. Veterans wait on average one year for decisions, despite the department’s commitment to adjudicate in less than four months.

The wait is therefore long and stressful, especially for Veterans who are making their first application. As the Veterans’ ombud pointed out, this first contact with the department, if negative, may create a strong impression among Veterans that they are rejected by a system that is supposed to help them. In recent years, in addition to the stress experienced by all Veterans who have applied, Francophones and women have experienced an additional injustice. In the case of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, in addition to the systematic injustice experienced for decades, the pressure of having to explain and re-explain their entire history to VAC has caused many to give up. Fairness issues arise when people are subject to injustice owing to their identity. When this injustice is deliberate, it becomes discriminatory and systemic. But it can also be the unintentional consequence of rules or processes that are implemented specifically for the benefit of the majority.

Most unfairness is rooted in a historical context where injustice was deliberate and systemic. When there is awareness of the injustice and a broad enough social consensus to address it, a willingness to end it emerges. This sets in motion reliable data collection to see whether unfairness persists in spite of government-stated commitments to



abolish it. These statistics gauge the effectiveness of government measures to fight persistent unintentional injustice.

According to the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman's 2018 study, francophones and women waited longer than anglophones and men. This injustice is not intentional, but its effects are no less clear. Nobody is refuting the main reason for this unintentional injustice: 85% of Veterans submit applications in English, and 85% of Veterans are men.

Six years later, francophones still wait longer than anglophones, but the gap between men and women has closed entirely. This shows that targeted, systematic government action can eliminate unfairness in only a few years. That is why the Committee is asking Veterans Affairs Canada to implement the same initiative for francophones.

When wait times were looked at, the Committee also discovered that the department's Table of Disabilities, which is used to assess the degree of impairment of an injury or disease related to military service, is unfair. Historically, almost all soldiers have been men, so the table includes very little information about the injuries and diseases that women are exposed to, such as the psychological consequences of sexual trauma, which could have contributed to longer delays. The Committee is pleased with the department's decision to review this document.

2SLGBTQ+ people faced deliberate, discriminatory and systemic injustice from the Canadian Armed Forces. It took until 1992 for discriminatory regulations to be lifted, and, despite this, many institutional problems persisted under the veil. It is not obvious that a broad social consensus to recognize this injustice has emerged: the road to reparations is being paved but is far from complete. The Canadian Armed Forces does not collect any data on its 2SLGBTQ+ members. Therefore, it is difficult to see how the institution can implement systemic change in the absence of fundamental data, and that is why the Committee is recommending that the Canadian Armed Forces collect this information via the mandatory self-identification form.

This lack of information adversely impacts Veterans Affairs Canada's ability to fairly and efficiently process the files of 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans. Given that military medical records have no reference to their identity, 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans are compelled to repeat their life story every time a new person is assigned to their case, which can lead to them having to deal with prejudice that is persisting, albeit not deliberately stronghanded as in the past. That is why the Committee is recommending more systematic training on the injustices experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ Veterans.

Repairing injustice is an ongoing process. More injustices are bound to surface in the coming years; some of them will be intentional, others, unintentional—and there will be

some that we are fuelling without even knowing it. We need to act in a way that anticipates the potentially unfair effects of the decisions that are made every day, we need to act in a way that will help to redress the injustices that we have not been able to anticipate, and we need to ensure that governments do the same.

The Committee wishes to recognize the sincere, robust efforts made by Veterans Affairs Canada to fight the injustices that were brought to its attention. Shortcomings persist, but we are confident the government will take appropriate action to eliminate them.



**APPENDIX A**  
**BRIEFING BY THE MINISTER OF VETERANS**  
**AFFAIRS AND DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS**

*Departmental Follow-ups*

*Suivis ministériels*

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA)

Comité permanent des anciens combattants (ACVA)

Briefing by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Department Officials

Séance d'information par le ministre des Anciens Combattants et des représentants du ministère.

February 1, 2022

1 février 2022

**Witnesses:**

*Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs*  
*Paul Ledwell, Deputy Minister*  
*Steven Harris, Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery*  
*Sara Lantz, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services Branch*

**Témoins :**

*L'hon. Lawrence MacAulay, ministre des Anciens Combattants*  
*Paul Ledwell, sous-ministre*  
*Steven Harris, sous-ministre adjoint, Secteur de la prestation des services*  
*Sara Lantz, sous-ministre adjointe intérimaire, Secteur de la dirigeante principale des finances et services ministériels*

<p><b><u>Question 1:</u></b> <i>In response to a question from Mr. Desilets, Mr. Ledwell offered to provide the Committee with figures on the wait times for disability benefits as experienced by Francophone vs. Anglophone Veterans.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Question 1:</u></b> <i>En réponse à une question de M. Desilets, M. Ledwell a offert de procurer au Comité des chiffres sur les temps d'attente pour prestations d'invalidité vécus par des vétérans francophones par rapport aux vétérans anglophones.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Response:</u></b> See Annex A</p>	<p><b><u>Réponse:</u></b> Voir annexe A</p>
<p><b><u>Question 2:</u></b> <i>In response to a question from Ms. Blaney, Mr. Ledwell agreed to provide the Committee with the number of VAC workers who were Veterans; he said that he would have to</i></p>	<p><b><u>Question 2:</u></b> <i>En réponse à une question de Mme Blaney, M. Ledwell a accepté de fournir au Comité le nombre de travailleurs d'ACC qui étaient des</i></p>

<p><i>check on how many were former correctional workers.</i></p>	<p><i>vétérans; il a dit qu'il devrait vérifier combien étaient d'anciens travailleurs correctionnels.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Response:</u></b>  The number of VAC workers who are Veterans is 166 or 4.4%. The majority, 147, are indeterminate employees, while the other 19 are term employees. We are unable to provide the number of former correctional workers, as we do not track that data.</p>	<p><b><u>Réponse:</u></b>  Le nombre de travailleurs d'ACC qui sont des anciens combattants est de 166, soit 4,4 %. La majorité, soit 147, sont des employés nommés pour une période indéterminée, tandis que les 19 autres sont des employés nommés pour une période déterminée. Nous ne sommes pas en mesure de fournir le nombre d'anciens travailleurs correctionnels, car nous ne suivons pas ces données.</p>
<p><b><u>Question 3:</u></b>  <i>In response to a question from Ms. Blaney, Mr. Ledwell said that he would look into whether the Veterans Bill of Rights were included in the training for VAC employees, and verify the Department's previous communication to Ms. Blaney about this matter.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Question 3:</u></b>  <i>En réponse à une question de Mme Blaney, M. Ledwell a dit qu'il vérifierait si la Déclaration des droits des anciens combattants faisait partie de la formation des employés d'ACC ainsi que la communication antérieure du Ministère à Mme Blaney à ce sujet.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Response:</u></b>  VAC is updating their orientation training for all employees to include information on the Veterans Bill of Rights.</p>	<p><b><u>Réponse:</u></b>  ACC met à jour sa formation d'orientation pour tous les employés afin d'inclure des renseignements sur la Déclaration des droits des anciens combattants.</p>



## Annex A:

# Turnaround Times by Language

All Turnaround Time (TAT) in this document are given in weeks.

## 2019-2020

For applications completed in 2019-20, the average TAT was:

- 32 weeks for all applicants
- 29 weeks for anglophone applicants
- 45 weeks for francophone applicants

## 2020-2021

For applications completed in 2020-21, the average TAT was:

- 37 weeks for all applicants
- 36 weeks for anglophone applicants
- 44 weeks for francophone applicants

## 2021-2022 (April 1, 2021 through January 1, 2022)

For applications completed in 2021-2022 the average TAT was:

- 33.4 weeks for all applicants
- 32.2 weeks for anglophone applicants
- 40.5 weeks for francophone applicants

## January 1 – 31, 2022

For applications completed in January 2022, the average TAT was:

- 28.0 weeks for all applicants
- 27.9 weeks for anglophone applicants
- 28.5 weeks for francophone applicants

Annexe A :

# Délais de traitement selon la langue

Tous les délais de traitement dans le présent document sont donnés en semaines.

## 2019-2020

Pour les demandes traitées en 2019-2020, le délai de traitement moyen était de :

- 32 semaines pour tous les demandeurs
- 29 semaines pour les demandeurs anglophones
- 45 semaines pour les demandeurs francophones

## 2020-2021

Pour les demandes traitées en 2020-2021, le délai de traitement moyen était de :

- 37 semaines pour tous les demandeurs
- 36 semaines pour les demandeurs anglophones
- 44 semaines pour les demandeurs francophones

## 2021-2022 (1<sup>er</sup> avril 2021 au 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2022)

Pour les demandes traitées en 2021-2022, le délai de traitement moyen était de :

- 33,4 semaines pour tous les demandeurs
- 32,2 semaines pour les demandeurs anglophones
- 40,5 semaines pour les demandeurs francophones

## Du 1<sup>er</sup> au 31 janvier 2022

Pour les demandes traitées en janvier 2022, le délai de traitement moyen était de :

- 28,0 semaines pour tous les demandeurs
- 27,9 semaines pour les demandeurs anglophones
- 28,5 semaines pour les demandeurs francophones

**APPENDIX B**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA RESPONSE TO THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS STUDY  
FAIRNESS IN THE SERVICES OFFERED TO VETERANS**

April 29, 2022

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg, MP  
Chair, Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs  
131 Queen Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Chair:

This is in response to your letter, sent on behalf of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, seeking clarification on the discrepancies between the data that was submitted to the Committee regarding wait times and that published in Veterans Affairs Canada's "Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report." In particular, you requested itemized information for Francophone and Anglophone Veterans, and male and female Veterans.

The care and well-being of the diverse women and men who defend our freedom is our top priority, and we remain committed to providing Veterans and their families with all the benefits and services to which they are entitled in the timely manner they deserve.

I am pleased to enclose a detailed response to the Committee's request for clarification, which provides an explanation of how we report processing time data, including context to explain data and the discrepancies therein, as well as the median and average turnaround time figures for fiscal years 2017–18 to 2021–22. Included also is an update on some of the changes the Department has made and our recent progress.

Again, thank you for writing, and I trust the information provided is helpful. In closing, please accept my best wishes and my sincere gratitude to you and your fellow committee members for your work to ensure that those who selflessly served Canada are treated with the respect they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence M. Aulay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

LAWRENCE MACAULAY, FC, MR

Enclosure

**VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA RESPONSE TO  
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS STUDY  
*FAIRNESS IN THE SERVICES OFFERED TO VETERANS:  
FRANCOPHONES AND ANGLOPHONES, MEN AND WOMEN,  
AND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY***

**Background and Context**

Regarding the discrepancies between wait times data submitted to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) on March 1, 2022, and the data in the “Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report” published by Veterans Affairs Canada ([www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/media-kits/dis-ben-process-summary-report](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/media-kits/dis-ben-process-summary-report)), there are several reasons for the differences in processing statistics referenced.

When the Department is invited to present at the ACVA, our officials are committed to providing the most current data available. However, the timing of these meetings often does not align with the quarterly publication of processing information in the Summary Report on our website, which is released within 90 days from the end of each quarter. As a result, there will always be some discrepancies between these figures.

Additionally, the types of applications referenced were different. The statistics provided to ACVA contained turnaround times based on all applications (first applications, departmental reviews and reassessments), but the website and the information provided within the Veterans Ombud’s 2018 report (this report provided statistics based on a file sample), provide turnaround times on first applications only.

We have consistently reported average wait times for a number of years and continue to use this as the standard approach for comparability and when referencing changes in processing times. With the additional staffing resources provided to Veterans Affairs Canada, we have significantly reduced, by almost 50 percent, the number of applications waiting beyond our service standard (the backlog). We expect to continue to reduce wait times across all categories with the hiring and extension of our additional employees dedicated to processing applications, in July 2020 and February 2022, based on government funding commitments.

Wait times statistics are based on completed applications, where a decision has been rendered. As a result, when we are able to successfully render decisions on applications that have been in a queue for a long time, the statistical average and

median wait times may appear longer, when, at the same time, we are making progress to reduce applications that are pending and processing times.

### **French/English Applications: Current Results**

The “Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report” for Quarter 2 (July–September 2021) published the *median* processing time for first applications as 76.0 weeks for French applications and 20.4 weeks for English applications. The *average* processing time for the same period was 59.8 weeks for French applications and 42.4 weeks for English applications. The processing gap was much smaller between French and English applications in Quarter 3 (October–December 2021). In that quarter, the *median* processing time was 41.4 weeks for French applications and 29.6 weeks for English applications, with an *average* of 49.1 weeks for French applications and 42.2 weeks for English applications.

When the results for fiscal year 2021–22 (as of December 31, 2021) are examined for first applications only, the average turnaround time was 40.4 weeks for English applications and 50.5 weeks for French applications. For comparison, in 2020–21, the average turnaround time was 42.8 weeks for English applications and 52.3 weeks for French applications.

### **Female/Male Applications: Current Results**

With respect to the difference in processing times between female and male applicants, the *median* processing time in Quarter 2 (July–September 2021) was 28.1 weeks for female applicants and 24.1 weeks for male applicants. The *average* processing time for female and male applicants was 46.2 weeks and 44.9 weeks, respectively.

In Quarter 3 (October–December 2021), applications from females were processed faster than applications from males. The *median* processing time was 25.6 weeks for female applicants and 33.0 weeks for male applicants. The *average* processing time for female and male applicants was 41.3 and 43.8 weeks, respectively.

When the results for fiscal year 2021–22 (as of December 31, 2021) are examined for first applications only, the average turnaround time was 42.9 weeks for female applicants and 41.7 weeks for male applicants. For comparison, in 2020–21, the average turnaround time was 50.5 weeks for female applicants and 43.1 weeks for male applicants.

So far this year, 16 percent of our completed applications belong to female applicants, who may be current or former members of the Canadian Armed Forces or RCMP. This is equal to the percentage of applications received from female

applicants. Because of their smaller number, relative to the number of applications from males, each one has a larger impact on the average turnaround time for female applications (i.e., a larger impact than one male application would have on the average turnaround time for male applications).

## **Moving Forward**

The Department may experience an increase in the average processing times for a certain type of application in a given quarter. While this would appear to be a setback, the reality is the average time increased because we processed a large number of older applications, thus raising the average time for that quarter. Following such a situation, we would expect to see the average times reduce in future quarters.

The “Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report” will be updated with statistics from Quarter 4 of fiscal year 2021–22 (ending March 31, 2022) within 90 days of the end of the quarter.

In September 2021, the Department added a team dedicated exclusively to processing claims from female applicants, who may be current or former members of the Canadian Armed Forces or RCMP. This team is developing expertise to ensure we can systematically address the current barriers and close the gap in processing times for female and male applicants. The Department also has a dedicated French unit and two bilingual teams, and, in the fall of 2020, five additional bilingual teams were established. These teams are focused on French applications and reducing turnaround time for these claims.

With our increased staffing capacity and streamlined processes, we have been able to make progress on the older applications. This, in turn, will lead to improvements in both French and female turnaround times in the coming months. We take these processing time discrepancies between groups very seriously and are committed to further improvements.

To ensure consistency with the “Disability Benefit Processing—Summary Report” and the information provided in the Veterans Ombud’s report, the information presented in the tables below is focused on disability benefit first applications only.

**Table 1: Applications Received by Quarter,  
Filtered by Application Created Date (First Applications Only)**

Application Count		First Application			
		English		French	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
2017–18	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	1,009	6,443	154	1,073
2018–19	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	1,250	7,880	204	1,417
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	1,002	6,282	162	995
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	1,102	6,919	182	1,048
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	1,216	6,884	137	930
2019–20	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	1,364	7,603	270	1,586
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	1,493	9,029	239	1,481
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	1,322	7,269	225	1,332
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	1,237	7,191	267	1,331
2020–21	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	814	3,994	142	737
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	978	5,545	164	942
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	1,098	5,864	196	1,097
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	1,463	7,145	254	1,229
2021–22	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	1,602	7,692	262	1,244
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	1,656	7,529	269	1,293
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	2,243	9,750	408	1,884

Please note, the figures in the report above on first applications received will not match the media kit data ([www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/media-kits/dis-ben-process-summary-report](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/media-kits/dis-ben-process-summary-report)) as there is a small number of clients in the system who are missing the language code and/or the sex code and are therefore excluded from this report.



**Table 2: Median Turnaround Time by Language and Sex for Disability Benefit First Applications (January 2018 to December 2021)**

Median TAT (weeks)		First Application			
		English		French	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
2017–18	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	27.1	23.9	48.3	50.3
2018–19	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	20.9	16.3	43.4	43.7
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	24.0	18.1	33.6	34.6
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	30.9	17.4	45.4	46.6
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	33.9	24.0	54.2	45.2
2019–20	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	31.4	26.7	59.5	51.6
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	35.0	31.3	72.4	48.1
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	43.6	33.4	66.3	41.4
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	38.6	29.0	61.1	52.4
2020–21	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	67.4	35.7	71.1	68.1
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	40.7	29.1	68.3	37.8
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	50.9	36.9	45.6	31.5
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	42.9	38.9	41.6	35.9
2021–22	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	30.0	20.9	28.1	18.6
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	23.4	20.0	70.6	77.1
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	25.7	30.7	24.7	44.6

Source: Validated Disability Benefits Dataset (RDBCAL) accessed on March 29, 2022

**Table 3: Average Turnaround Time by Language and Sex for Disability Benefit First Applications (January 2018 to December 2021)**

Average (Mean) TAT (weeks)		First Application			
		English		French	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
2017–18	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	30.4	26.3	46.0	46.4
2018–19	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	27.0	22.0	40.2	42.9
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	32.5	26.8	41.2	40.3
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	34.0	27.8	44.1	44.9
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	39.2	31.9	53.8	47.7
2019–20	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	39.3	32.9	56.9	52.9
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	43.6	37.1	56.9	53.2
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	48.0	41.6	56.7	49.2
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	44.7	37.1	62.7	50.2
2020–21	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	52.2	43.1	69.6	56.6
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	46.4	36.7	58.8	49.1
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	50.2	43.3	55.2	45.0
	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	47.4	43.6	58.5	54.8
2021–22	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	41.0	35.5	46.9	42.1
	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	43.2	42.3	60.6	59.5
	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	41.2	42.5	42.2	50.8

Source: Validated Disability Benefits Dataset (RDBCAL) accessed on March 29, 2022

## APPENDIX C LIST OF WITNESSES

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The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b>Department of Veterans Affairs</b> Steven Harris, Assistant Deputy Minister Service Delivery Branch  Amy Meunier, Director General Centralized Operations Division	2022/03/04	6
<b>Rainbow Veterans of Canada</b> Todd Ross, Co-Chair	2022/03/04	6
<b>Veterans Transition Network</b> Oliver Thorne, Executive Director	2022/03/04	6
<b>As an individual</b> Brigitte Laverdure Sgt Nina Charlene Usherwood	2022/03/22	7
<b>LGBT Purge Fund</b> Michelle Douglas, Executive Director	2022/03/22	7
<b>The Pepper Pod</b> Sandra Perron, Founder and Chief Executive Officer	2022/03/22	7
<b>As an individual</b> Jean Laurion, Veteran	2022/03/29	9
<b>National Association of Federal Retirees</b> Sayward Montague, Director Advocacy  Anthony Pizzino, Chief Executive Officer Jean-Guy Soulière, President	2022/03/29	9
<b>VETS Canada</b> Debbie Lowther, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder	2022/03/29	9



## APPENDIX D LIST OF BRIEFS

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The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

**National Association of Federal Retirees**



# REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 6, 7, 9, 17 and 18](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Emmanuel Dubourg  
Chair

