



OCT 31 2017

The Honourable Kevin Sorenson, P.C., M.P.
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Sorenson:

I am responding to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' letter of September 14, 2017, requesting a status report on the progress of efforts in respect of specific recommendations made by the Committee in September 2016 with regard to Report 6, Canada Pension Plan Disability Program, of the 2015 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

I wish to express my appreciation for the Committee's continued work and recommendations to improve the Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) Program and better serve applicants and beneficiaries.

The Department continues to meet the commitments and timelines in the Department's Management Response and Management Action Plan to the 2015 Report of the Auditor General, which includes comprehensive renewal of the Program. Following the Government Response to the Committee's report tabled in the House of Commons on December 8, 2016, I am pleased to provide the Committee with an update on the progress we have made towards improving the CPPD Program.

Your letter requests updates on three items in particular: (1) a status report on the progress of efforts at expediting the application process; (2) a report detailing how the Department has used the lessons learned from its analysis of the triage review; and (3) if the average time to receive the benefit has actually been reduced. I am pleased to update the Committee on our continued progress on these items.

Expediting the application process

The Department recognizes that the application process can be very complex and time consuming for Canadians to complete. The Department has made good progress with regard to streamlining and simplifying the application process as part of its Canada Pension Plan Service Improvement Strategy. A prototype of the revised paper application kit has been developed using an iterative approach, which involved consultations with internal service delivery staff, federal

.../2

government employees belonging to the Employees with Disability Network, the CPPD Program Client and Stakeholder Roundtable and non-governmental representatives who support Canadians in applying for CPPD benefits. The revised application, which will also be tested with users, will be available to Canadians in 2018, with work ongoing to implement an online application in 2019. The Department continues to build on its outreach efforts with clients and stakeholders to ensure broad awareness and accessibility to the benefit.

Using lessons learned from the triage process

As outlined in the Government Response to the Committee's report tabled in the House of Commons on December 8, 2016, the Department has incorporated the lessons learned from the findings of the triage review into the development of quality assurance activities, feedback mechanisms and business intelligence. These enhancements continue to be strengthened and contribute to the improved decision-making process.

The triage review findings continue to inform the phased implementation of the CPPD Quality Assurance Framework. A key component of the Framework is the development of a new Medical Adjudication Quality Assurance Review Program to assess whether medical adjudication decisions are appropriate and consistent, based on sound evidence that aligns with legislation, jurisprudence and policies. This Program builds on observations made during the triage review that there was considerable variability in how adjudication decisions were being made. Currently in the pilot phase, this new Program will provide new insights into how medical decisions are made, inform improvements to policies and procedures and enhance feedback to adjudicators. The Medical Adjudication Quality Assurance Review Program will launch nationally in spring 2018.

As indicated in the Government Response, the triage review findings have also contributed to identifying and addressing areas within the medical adjudication process needing improvement. For example, the review highlighted that consideration of personal characteristics (such as age, education, work experience and language proficiency) and how these may impact an applicant's capacity to work, were not documented in the decisions of some files where they should have been considered. The consideration of personal characteristics is required as a result of a Federal Court of Appeal decision. As well, applicants with multiple medical conditions comprised many of the files in the triage review, suggesting the need for more guidance on how to adjudicate these complex cases. Informed by these findings, the Department is currently revising its operational policies and procedures for these decision factors.

The triage review also revealed that applicants with chronic pain conditions accounted for many of the triage review files. Accordingly, updated medical reference guides on chronic pain are being developed. The first of these guides, on fibromyalgia, has been completed and implemented.

Finally, lessons learned from triage review identified the need for greater consistency in the Department's efforts to seek additional information from clients and the need for proactive communication. New client engagement strategies piloted between April 2016 and January 2017 improved client communication through the introduction of phone calls to clients at key points throughout the adjudication process. This strategy allows clients to receive information on their application throughout the adjudication process and ensures that they have provided all the information to support a decision and quality decision making as early as possible in the process. This approach will be piloted nationally this fall.

Reducing the average time to receive the benefit

The Department is making improvements with regard to how long it takes to receive a decision once it has received an application. Following a comprehensive review in 2016, which included consultations with CPPD clients and stakeholders, the Department implemented new CPPD service standards effective October 31, 2016.

Following consultations with stakeholders and clients, the review concluded that the existing service standard of 120 days for initial decisions and reconsiderations was appropriate and reasonable as it allows sufficient time to obtain additional information to support an applicant's claim, but that the performance target should be increased. The review further concluded that new service commitments were needed for applicants with terminal illnesses and grave conditions. Overall, the Department's new service standards represent a significant commitment to enhance CPPD service delivery. The CPPD service standards and the results for the 2016–2017 fiscal year are as follows:

- For initial applications, the Department's goal is to make initial decisions within 120 calendar days of receiving a complete application. The Department aims to meet this standard 80 percent of the time, up from the previous objective of 75 percent. I am pleased to report that the Department achieved its target in 2016–2017, making a decision within these timelines 84 percent of the time.
- For cases in which the client requests a reconsideration of the Department's initial decision, the Department's goal is to make a decision within 120 calendar days of receiving a request for reconsideration. Similar to an initial application, the Department aims to meet this standard 80 percent of the time, up from the previous objective of 70 percent. I am pleased to report that the Department achieved its target in 2016–2017, making a decision within these timelines 84 percent of the time.

New service standards that recognize the unique circumstances of applicants with terminal illnesses and grave conditions, as well as operational targets, were introduced:

- For applicants with a terminal illness, the Department's goal is to make a decision within 5 business days of receiving a complete application. The Department aims to meet this standard 95 percent of the time. While the Department fell short on meeting the objective, 90 percent of applicants had a decision made within 5 business days. Overall, the average number of days to receive a decision for terminally ill applicants in 2016–2017 was 4.5 days.
- For applicants with a grave condition, the Department's goal is to make a decision within 30 business days of receiving a complete application. The Department aims to meet this standard 80 percent of the time. In 2016–2017, the Department met this commitment 79 percent of the time and the average number of days for all grave condition applicants was 28 days.

The Department continues to monitor existing workload and processes to identify ways to improve performance outcomes. Improved methods for expedited triaging of applications from applicants with terminal illness or grave conditions have been implemented and are expected to enable the Department to meet targets in the future.

These service standards continue to help ensure that Canadians get timely access to the benefits to which they are entitled. The Department is committed to reporting on CPPD service standards and performance measures annually through the Canada.ca website, in the Departmental Performance Report, as well as in the Canada Pension Plan annual report.

The Department will review the new CPPD service standards and performance measures for the first three years and every two years thereafter. The first annual performance review of the strengthened service standards and the newly introduced service standards for applicants with terminal illness and grave medical conditions is planned for this fall, a year after implementation. The reviews on a go-forward basis will ensure that the Department's CPPD service standards remain appropriate over time.

Overall, the renewal of the CPPD Program continues to be complemented by the Canada Pension Plan Service Improvement Strategy, which is focused on implementing client-centred service delivery improvements to support the CPP Program, including implementing electronic services, automation and business process changes to improve client service and increase efficiency.

The Government of Canada remains committed to the comprehensive renewal of this important program to better serve the needs of vulnerable Canadians. I thank you again for the opportunity to update this Committee on the progress towards renewing the CPPD Program.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louise", followed by a short horizontal line.

Louise Levonian
Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development