



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2001 - 2006

Canada

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

It is my pleasure, as the Minister of Veterans Affairs, to introduce the Veterans Affairs Canada Strategic Plan for the period 2001 to 2006. It is, I believe, a document that successfully links a proud past with a promising future.

The transition to a new millennium has prompted Canadians to consider the tremendous pace and scope of change. We are all challenged to recognize emerging trends and adjust to new realities. Government and citizens alike must find new ways of doing things if Canada is to remain one of the world's best places to live. As we look toward a new century of shared endeavour, however, it is important to look back and remember the achievements that form the foundation of today's free, tolerant and prosperous Canadian democracy.

Some of the most remarkable chapters in Canada's history have been written by our veterans and their families. They have made outstanding contributions to the development of Canada, the preservation of freedom and the quest for world peace.

Our veterans' achievements are timeless. Their needs are not. Over the past few years, the government has actively worked to amend legislation, adapt programs and improve services designed to express Canada's gratitude to those who, in peace and war, have served us with distinction. Our list of clients has grown. In many cases their needs have become more acute or complex. As needs evolve, we must continue to adjust so that Veterans Affairs' special clients always receive the quality services and support which are their due. This Strategic Plan outlines how we will meet that challenge.



This plan was developed as a result of extensive consultation with veterans' representatives and other members of our client family, the Department's dedicated employees, governmental and non-governmental partners and other stakeholders. With their input, the Department has produced a dynamic Five-Year Strategic Plan – one that will be reviewed annually so that priorities can be routinely aligned with available capacity and the evolving needs of our very special group of clients.

I am confident that, using this Plan as our guide, Veterans Affairs Canada will effectively meet the diverse and changing needs of its clients, while creating a fulfilling, rewarding environment in which our employees can pursue their vocation of service to Canadians. Building on the legacies of the past, this Plan positions the Department of Veterans Affairs to help foster together a stronger Canada for our future.

The Honourable Ron J. Duhamel

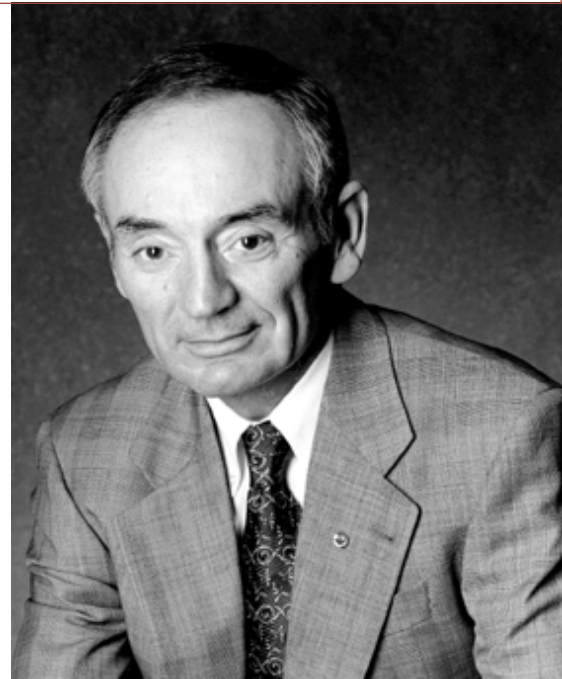
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ron J. Duhamel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" being more prominent and the last name "Duhamel" written in a continuous script.

Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State
(Western Economic Diversification)
(Francophonie)

DEPUTY MINISTER'S MESSAGE

This Strategic Plan is built on a history of devotion to service that goes back more than eighty years. Over this period, the Government of Canada has accepted responsibility for the care, treatment and re-establishment in civil life of war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and their dependants. Veterans Affairs Canada has long prided itself on the quality of service that it has been able to provide to these veterans and their families. More recently, the Department's services also have been extended to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, numerous civilians who participated in the war effort, and their eligible spouses and children. We are proud to serve our entire family of clients. Underlying all of our services is a recognition that the Department's primary duty to Canada's veterans and the other members of our client family is to honour their past and recent achievements and repay, as best we can, Canada's debt of gratitude.

In preparing the Strategic Plan, VAC conducted extensive consultations with veterans' organizations, partners and other stakeholders, to help us take stock of where the Department is today and decide where it must go in the future. While we have many important challenges to face over the next five years, one thing is clear: VAC's foremost priority will be to improve our current services to veterans and other clients. In practical terms, this means that we will maintain our service excellence to war veterans and strengthen our services to Canadian Forces veterans, achieving an overall improvement in the delivery of our health care and disability pension programs. A second priority will be to enhance our



organizational effectiveness through more strategic management of our staff, improved communications, expanded use of technologies and a greater contribution to national policy development in areas that are directly related to the well-being of our veterans and other clients. These measures will also make an essential contribution to the improvement of VAC's current services.

The strategic course that has been set for our Department's future will involve new challenges, more varied activities and progressive changes for all VAC staff. But the directions and priorities outlined in the Plan will help us deal with these and, I believe, create the conditions for a vibrant organization and a fulfilling workplace. As we begin to work toward the achievement of our strategic objectives, I would like to give special thanks to VAC staff for their dedicated service ethic. This has been, and will remain, VAC's real strength. As a result, we are well positioned to achieve our vision.

I would also like to thank the many staff, clients, veterans' organizations, stakeholders and partners who have participated in one way or another in the preparation of VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan. I am convinced that as a result of their contributions, the plan will have greater utility, meaning and credibility.



Larry Murray

Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategic objectives and priorities which are outlined in this plan will set a course for VAC that will confirm the Department's relevancy, enhance the integrity of its programs and make for a vibrant, challenging workplace.

OUR GENERAL DIRECTION

Over the next five years, VAC will concentrate its energies on improving services to its current clients and on adapting its programs to meet changing and evolving needs. To accomplish this, VAC will need a full complement of trained and motivated staff, as well as appropriate program resources.

OUR PRIORITIES

The ten priorities which are outlined in this plan support VAC's two strategic objectives, **Integrity of Our Programs and Service Improvement** and **Organizational Effectiveness**. More importantly, however, they recognize VAC's and Canada's long-standing commitment and debt of gratitude to veterans. VAC's overriding priority is to continue to improve services on their behalf, while at the same time providing excellent services to the other members of our client family.

Over the five-year horizon, VAC will give priority to:

- improving and expanding services to Canadian Forces veterans;
- achieving continued improvements in the delivery of its health care programs and its client-centred service approach;
- affirming and possibly expanding its commemoration mandate;
- renovating Ste. Anne's Hospital and furthering its development as a centre of expertise in the care of the aged;

- conducting a fundamental review of the disability pension process to address client concerns and bring about continued improvements;
- advancing the development of its information technology capacity in support of service improvement and organizational effectiveness;
- enhancing its strategic policy capacity in support of greater involvement in national policy issues;
- strategic human resources planning to align human resources management with strategic objectives;
- improving its communications capacity; and
- better integrating and coordinating its strategic, business, human resource, information management/information technology and sustainable development planning.

In working together to achieve these important elements of the Plan, VAC employees will be guided by revised mission, vision and value statements for the Department.

1. OUR MANDATE

Canada's development as an independent country with a unique identity stems in no small measure from its achievements in times of war. A good part of our modern identity is also associated with pride in Canada's enviable peacekeeping record. But Canada's contribution to global peace and security, both as ally and peacekeeping partner, has come at a heavy price in terms of lives sacrificed, health forfeited and hopes unfulfilled.

The Department exists to repay the nation's debt of gratitude toward those whose courageous efforts have given us this legacy, and have contributed to our growth as a nation.

VAC's mandate stems from laws and regulations. Among the more significant is the *Department of Veterans Affairs Act*, which charges the Minister of Veterans Affairs with the following responsibilities:

"... the care, treatment, or re-establishment in civil life of any person who served in the Canadian Forces or merchant navy or in the naval, army or air forces or merchant navies of Her Majesty, of any person who has otherwise engaged in pursuits relating to war; and of any other person designated ... and the care of the dependants or survivors of any person referred to ..."

The Department meets its responsibilities through its various programs. These include programs for disability pensions, veterans allowances, pension advocacy, health care and commemoration. They provide compensation for hardships arising from disabilities and lost economic opportunities, innovative health and social services, professional legal assistance and recognition of the achievements and sacrifices of Canadians during periods of war and conflict.

VAC provides services to a highly diverse clientele which reflects the remarkable breadth of Canada's contributions to world peace. Our clients include:

Veterans:

- Armed Forces and Merchant Navy veterans who served during the First World War, Second World War or Korean War;
- Former and, in certain cases, current members of the Canadian Forces, including those who served in Special Duty Areas and in peacekeeping; and
- Allied veterans who lived in Canada prior to periods of war.

Other Clients:

- Certain civilians who are entitled to benefits because of their war time services;
- Former and, in certain cases, serving members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and
- Survivors and dependants of the foregoing groups.

In addition to serving these clients, VAC receives many inquiries from members of the public. We are proud to assist those who approach the Department with requests for information on our programs, services and activities.

VAC's Commemoration Program is designed to honour all those who served Canada in the cause of peace, while reaching an audience that includes the entire Canadian population as well as the world community.

2. OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Revised versions of VAC's Mission and Vision statements, along with a new statement of Values and Ethics, represent important parts of this Strategic Plan.

- Our Mission statement essentially explains why VAC exists.
- Our Vision statement represents a shared image of VAC's future and what we hope to achieve together over the five-year horizon and beyond.
- Our Values and Ethics both reflect and shape VAC's organizational culture; they guide us in our decisions and actions.

These new statements have added credibility in the context of this plan. They are largely the product of many hours of consultation with VAC staff and the thoughtful comments and suggestions which they have provided.

OUR MISSION

To provide exemplary, client-centred services and benefits that respond to the needs of veterans, our other clients and their families, in recognition of their services to Canada; and to keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

OUR VISION

To provide exemplary service which honours the sacrifice and achievements of our veterans and clients.

OUR VALUES AND ETHICS

At Veterans Affairs Canada we value our clients' contributions to the development of Canada as a nation and honour the sacrifices they have made in the defence of freedom and the pursuit of world peace. In expressing Canada's gratitude to them, we strive to exemplify the high principles which they have defended.

Integrity

We act with honesty and fairness and always strive to do the right thing.

Respect

We treat everyone with respect. We recognize the dignity that is inherent in all people and celebrate the strength that comes from the diversity of people and ideas.

Service

We take pride in our role as public servants and are dedicated to service excellence. We are committed to responsive, quality service, delivered with timeliness, courtesy and fairness.

Accountability

We are accountable and responsible for our actions and accept the consequences of our decisions.

Teamwork

We value teamwork, and promote the principles of partnership, consultation and open communication.

Balance

We encourage the achievement of a healthy balance in the working and personal lives of employees, believing that this contributes to the vitality of individuals, our organization and our communities.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

To plan ahead with confidence, organizations have to be aware of important forces within their environment that can influence where they want to go in the future, as well as how they get there.

To help with its strategic planning, VAC took the time to study its environment and to discuss the findings with staff, veterans' organizations and its partners. Our results highlighted factors which most people believe will influence the Department over the next few years. Beyond the factor of the Department's projected clientele over the next decade (which is discussed in the next section), the factors listed below are those which our studies and consultations have revealed will matter the most for VAC.

KEY FACTORS WITHIN VAC'S ENVIRONMENT

Fiscal and financial health

An important consideration for VAC will be the amount of federal or provincial government funding which will be available over the next five years to devote to programs for veterans and our other clients, and more generally, for Canadian seniors. This will influence VAC's ability to adapt its programs to changing client needs. It may also affect the quality of its client-centred case management approach, which integrates programs and services available inside and outside the Department.

Medical advances

Emerging medical advances and their potential impact on human health could influence the type of health services which VAC will deliver in the future. One can foresee, for instance, that such advances could increase life expectancy for veterans and improve the state of their health.

Federal role and priorities

The federal government's prominent role in Canadian society, and how this role is expressed, could have an impact on some of VAC's programs, including national commemoration activities and our potential contributions to the Canadian health sector. Policy choices with respect to greater or lesser involvement in seniors' issues will also influence the Department, as may the future extent of Canadian peacekeeping operations.

Trends in service delivery

Government involvement in making services available on-line and through remote access, worldwide trends in centralizing services, and developments in client-centred approaches to health care delivery will have an influence on VAC over the next decade. These trends, both on their own and considered together, hold the promise of further improvements in service delivery and benefits processing.

Other factors

Other external factors such as the general aging of the Canadian population, globalization, potential international conflicts, possible changes in government organization and the overall state of the labour market will also influence VAC. Although the extent and nature of their impact is less certain, these factors also merit close attention as VAC considers how to operate most effectively at the outset of the 21st century.

4. IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR VAC

Over the summer of 2000, several discussion forums and interviews were organized to hear from VAC employees, subject experts, organizations representing various veterans' groups and other clients, business partners, and senior managers on key issues facing the Department. The issues which are highlighted below reflect their insights on the main opportunities and challenges for VAC.

WHAT TYPE OF ISSUES WILL VAC FACE?

The people and organizations consulted by VAC have suggested that VAC will face three types of issues over the next few years and into the present decade:

- **service delivery issues** – challenges with respect to how and to whom VAC will deliver programs and services;
- **service support issues** – questions about the type of support and resources VAC will need to deliver services; and
- **contributing to the national agenda** – issues relating to how VAC will position itself to better contribute to national objectives.

SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES

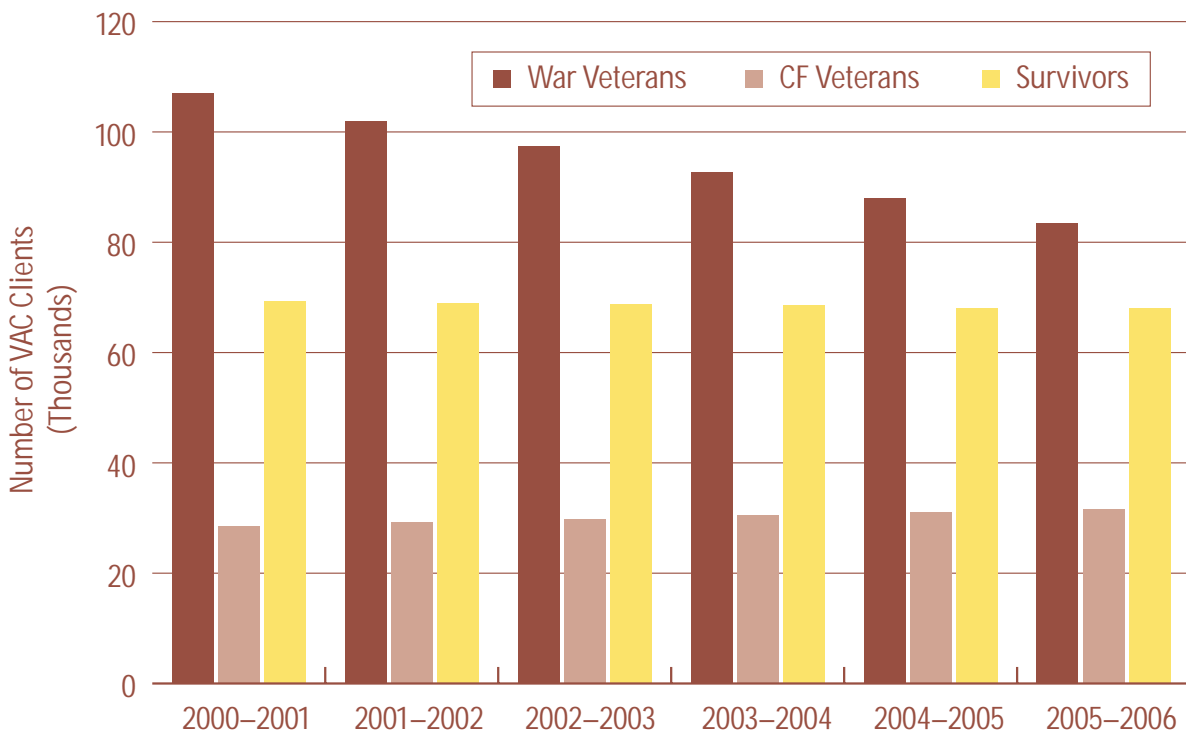
Veterans and other clients we serve

In recent years, there has been a common impression among many Canadians, and even within the public service, that the number of VAC's clients is quickly diminishing and that the Department may soon disappear.

This perception is not based in fact. The number of veterans and other clients whom VAC serves will remain strong over the next eight to ten years and beyond. During this same time frame their age will make their care needs even more intensive than at present.

Figure 1:
Forecast of VAC Clients by Client Group
(2000-2001 to 2005-2006)

At December 15, 2000



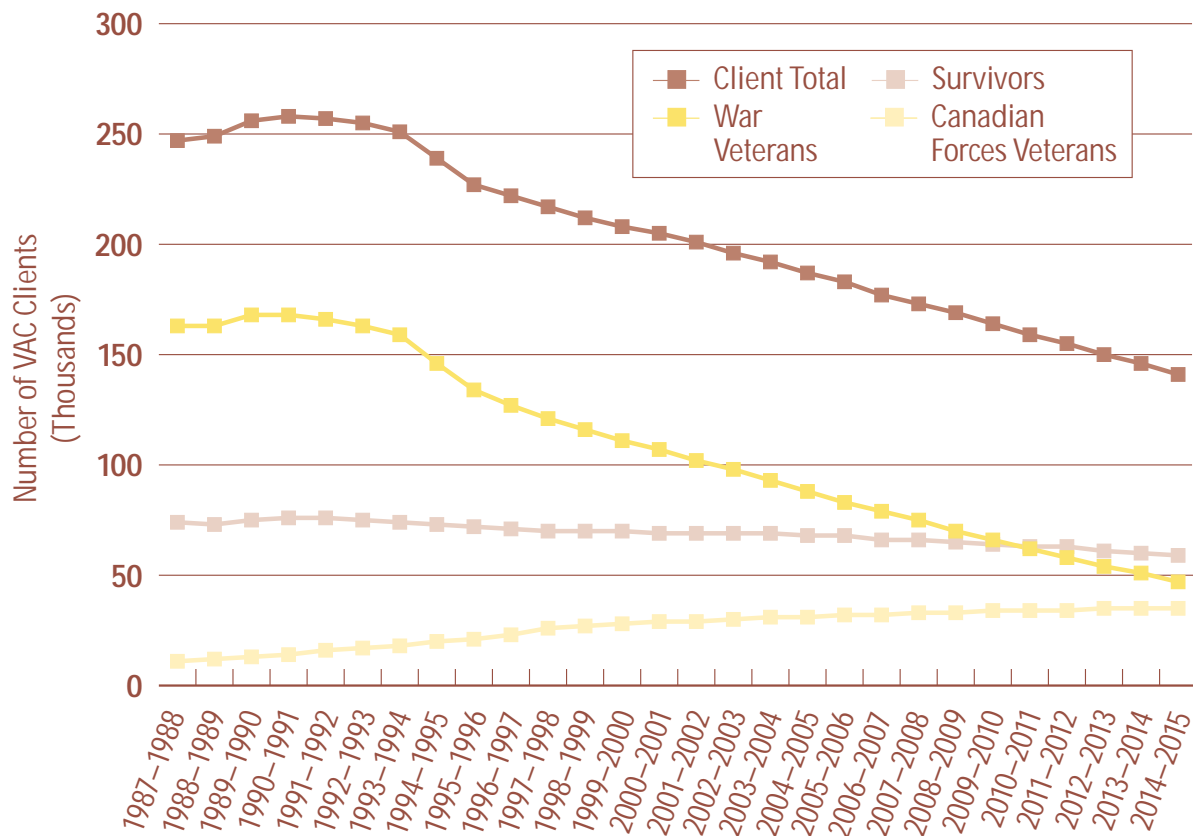
Source: VAC Statistics Directorate

VAC's family of clients includes war veterans and Canadian Forces veterans. It also includes their eligible spouses and dependants. As can be seen in Figure 1 above, it is true that some of our clients will not be with us by 2006. War veterans will decline by about 22%, from 107,000 to approximately 83,300. The size of other client groups, however, will remain relatively unchanged or experience an increase over the planning period. Family members of deceased eligible veterans and other clients, mostly widows and dependent children, will remain in the range of 68,000 to 69,000. Eligible Canadian Forces veterans will actually increase from 28,600 to approximately 31,700.

Taken together, these trends suggest that by the year 2006, VAC's client base will have declined, but only by 10.6%, from 204,900 to a projected 183,100. By 2015, VAC will still

Figure 2:
Demographic Trends of VAC Clients
(1987-88 to 2014-15)

At November 24, 2000



Source: VAC Statistics Directorate

have approximately 141,000 clients to serve. By this time though, because of the continuing trend described above, war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and eligible surviving family members will have almost equal representation within VAC's clientele. (See Figure 2 above.)

Apart from the clients who access benefits and services, it must not be forgotten that VAC also serves a much larger constituency through its Commemoration Program. This program honours deceased veterans through grave site and monument maintenance, but also focuses on surviving veterans, Canadian youth and the general public through special remembrance events, and related education programs.

Given projected trends in client population, VAC's main challenge over the next five years and beyond will be to position itself to best serve its diversified client groups, responding effectively to their different and evolving needs.

Adapting our models of service delivery

In the past, and until recently, many VAC programs have run almost independently of each other. This situation was mainly a reflection of how programs came into being and the needs which they served at a particular place in time.

Today, many of our clients access several of our economic, disability pension and health-related programs, simply because their advanced years or personal circumstances dictate a greater need. Therefore, it is more effective for VAC to structure its services around each person's comprehensive needs rather than along program lines, as was the case in the past. This is one of the pillars of VAC's current client-centred service approach. Many client needs can be fulfilled within our full menu of programs; others by programs or services found outside the Department. Over the next five years and into the longer term, VAC will be challenged to continually adapt its client-centred service approach to best meet the changing needs of both traditional war and Canadian Forces veterans, and their families.

The use of technology

Like many other federal departments, VAC strongly supports the use of technology to improve its services and communication with clients. In fact, information technology is already a large part of our operations. Our recent investment in a new Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) is one example of how information systems are being used at VAC to support a client-centred service approach. The next important step in VAC's use of technology will be to offer veterans and other clients other service options which could make it easier to access VAC programs. In keeping with the government's national objective, VAC will make services available on the Internet. This will accommodate a growing demand by Canadians to use this tool to conduct business. In offering this optional service however, VAC will retain its commitment to traditional services offered by telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings.

Affirming our mandate

Our consultations have pointed out that VAC should place a greater priority on two long-standing components of its mandate: responsibility for Canadian Forces veterans and responsibility to the general Canadian public with respect to commemoration activities. Both commitments require a strong re-affirmation if growing expectations and needs are to be met.

VAC's more active involvement with Canadian Forces veterans is being developed in partnership with the Department of National Defence. Together, the departments are exploring ways that VAC can improve its current services to this important client group. VAC has an important role to play in delivering expanded services to assist with the Government's Quality of Life initiative for these Canadians.

VAC's commemoration activities, on the other hand, have a tremendous potential to contribute in a positive way to a celebration of Canada's national identity and the education of Canadian youth. Building upon recent initiatives to further acknowledge our clients' critical role in the defence of world peace, VAC is well positioned to provide leadership in the development, coordination and delivery of national commemorative activities.

SERVICE SUPPORT ISSUES

Pressure on program resources

VAC prides itself on the face-to-face client contact it maintains through our district offices, Ste. Anne's Hospital and home visits by our area counsellors. VAC is privileged to provide quality service to its clients and remains true to its service philosophy of offering client-centred service and case management that meets as many client needs as is possible. Staff in our Regional offices and our headquarters in Charlottetown are equally proud of the role they play in support of this client-centred approach.

As our war veterans advance in age, the amount of personalized contact they require from VAC staff increases. Personalized services are also needed by many Canadian Forces veterans to accommodate their special circumstances. Both of these emerging trends will place added pressure on VAC counsellors and district staff, who already carry heavy caseloads. In order to address these pressures, VAC will have to examine the allocation of additional resources

to field offices. Similarly, if the VAC Commemoration Program is to meet its full potential, it will require an infusion of additional financial and human resources, and a further expansion of its network of partners.

Managing and looking after VAC staff

In accepting the challenging work that lies before it over the next five years, VAC will have to be very mindful of its most valuable resource, **its staff**. They face a decade that will feature changing programs and evolving client needs, the need to master new tasks, technologies and responsibilities, and turnovers in our workforce as many public servants retire. VAC will have to plan ahead to address the many human resource concerns that these changes generate. Particular attention will have to be paid to staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities for employees, assisting employees through periods of transition, ensuring greater diversity in the workplace and fostering effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. Inevitably, the Department will also have to focus energy and attention on advancing work on the Universal Classification System (UCS) and ensuring adequate human resources capacity to support its human resources strategic objectives.

Communications issues

VAC has been a dynamic department, especially over the last 20 years. It has pioneered and implemented many innovative health care programs for veterans and other clients, improved its processes to award disability pensions and economic assistance, increased eligibility for many services and benefits, expanded the reach of its Commemoration Program and also invested in new technology and research to improve service quality. While these activities have produced very positive results, they have also put a great deal of strain on the Department's communications capacity. Each of these accomplishments has generated the need to consult and communicate with veterans, other clients, VAC employees, the Canadian public and our partners. This trend will continue well into the present decade. As a result, VAC is now at a point where it has to address gaps in its ability to meet all of its communication responsibilities. Key among these is VAC's ability to share program and other important information effectively with its clients.

CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

VAC's research and strategic policy capacity

People who are familiar with VAC's accomplishments in the fields of compensation, seniors' health, health care service delivery and commemoration are often surprised that the Department is not more prominently mentioned or consulted during national policy discussions that touch on these topics. The main reason why VAC has not had a significant voice in some of these discussions in the past has been its strong focus on its immediate clients. Today however, VAC can see that it has an important contribution to make to the national policy discussion, and that its clients can also benefit from a greater sharing of information and ideas. To achieve the objective of making an important contribution to the national agenda, VAC will have to strengthen its research and strategic policy capacities. It will also have to assume a more active role in the National Capital and increase its involvement in interdepartmental policy forums.

VAC's commemoration mandate

Recent commemoration events like The *Tomb of The Unknown Soldier* have demonstrated a growing realization among Canadians that our national identity and development as a country owe much to fellow citizens who served in the world wars, subsequent military conflicts and peacekeeping operations. This kind of positive public support and its importance to our national unity compels VAC to reaffirm its commemoration mandate and find new ways of nurturing this recognition and unifying sentiment.

VAC's experience in health care and compensation sectors

The attention of the federal and provincial governments is increasingly turning to matters of health and better ways of coordinating and managing health care systems. As an active member of Canada's public health sector, VAC can make a valuable contribution to policy and program discussions, especially those relating to seniors. The Department's history of research into veterans' health, its experience in program development and its long case history of providing direct long-term care at federal care institutions makes it a valuable health care partner. Furthermore, the Department's experience in the areas of case management and client-centred service delivery equip it to contribute valuable insights to discussions in the areas of income and health policy.

5. OUR FUTURE DIRECTION

The next five years . . .

Many employees and members of the Canadian public wonder if planning VAC's future over the next five years means adopting strategic objectives that will take the Department beyond its present mandate and into new areas of business. The short answer is "no". The truth of the matter is that, for this time period, VAC will have a very full slate of activity simply fulfilling its responsibilities to war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and other clients. As was indicated earlier, our clients will continue to exist in large numbers up to the end of 2006, by which time they will only have decreased by a projected 10.6 percent.

A 10.6 percent decline in the client population will not diminish workloads for VAC employees. Throughout the next five years and beyond, many of our war veterans will require enhanced, more attentive health care services and more personalized face-to-face assistance from VAC staff due to advancing age. Others, especially Canadian Forces veterans, will be seeking improved services that allow them to better access compensation programs, appropriate counselling and assistance to address quality of life concerns. In addition, VAC will continue to be a leader in service quality improvements. Our priorities in this Plan indicate that over the next five years, staff workload associated with health care initiatives, commemoration and the pension process will be undiminished.

What about the longer term?

While Departmental mandates may be changed, VAC does not foresee actively pursuing new lines of business within the next five years. It will not rule out the selective acceptance of new programs or activities that are closely related to what we do now, that are appropriately resourced and that do not compromise our service commitments to veterans and other current clients. The Department will be prepared to consider such options and opportunities during the time frame of this Plan, but will not pro-actively seek them. The best time to re-examine our mandate and consider new lines of business will be as we approach the end of the decade and begin to experience a more noticeable decline in our clientele.

6. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

VAC will pursue its Vision and the issues and priorities emphasized for this planning period through the following two Strategic Objectives.

OBJECTIVE 1 – INTEGRITY OF OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Over the next five years, VAC will place emphasis on ensuring that its core health, disability pension, compensation and commemoration programs meet the needs of veterans and other valued clients.

It will strive to reach this objective by:

- making sure that programs remain relevant in the face of changing and evolving needs;
- ensuring programs are adequately resourced;
- adopting an active, comprehensive case management role on the behalf of clients to coordinate and maximize access to services and benefits;
- making use of continuous improvement models of service delivery;
- maintaining its commitment to continue to offer face-to-face, personalized services;
- treating all veterans and other clients with equal respect and attention;
- continually reviewing, improving and monitoring our processes, including the use of technology, to improve program delivery and service quality; and
- ensuring adequate training and support for VAC staff.

OBJECTIVE 2 – ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Strengthening our human resources planning

The extensive background work and wide consultations which have formed the basis of the VAC planning process have identified a clear need for better human resources planning. This will help VAC weather the organization changes which it will experience over the next decade and ensure that it has the right people in the right place at the right time to uphold our pledge of quality service to clients.

In order to meet this need, the Department will:

- structure VAC human resources planning so that it is closely aligned with the Department's strategic planning and business planning process.

Strengthening internal and external communications

Consultations held in support of the strategic planning process also revealed that, in order to make our processes and programs run more effectively, VAC will have to find ways to better and more often communicate with clients, other government entities, partners and VAC staff.

In order to meet this need, the Department will:

- redefine, restructure and resource the Corporate Communications function to address current gaps and priorities; and
- strive to enhance communications skills and tools throughout VAC.

Connecting to the national agenda

An important part of being more effective as a federal organization is becoming more involved in matters of national policy for the benefit of a wider Canadian public. VAC is well positioned to contribute to many topics on the Government's list of priorities. Over the planning period, the Department will draw on its knowledge and experience to make a greater contribution to the national agenda in areas such as health care coordination and management; compensation programs; and commemoration, including education programs for youth and nation building activities. The pursuit of this objective and the exchange of ideas it entails will benefit the nation as a whole, while helping VAC improve its own programs and chart its longer term future.

The Department's strategy in advancing this objective will involve:

- a greater VAC presence at federal interdepartmental and intergovernmental planning and policy forums;
- enhanced research and strategic policy development capacities within VAC; and
- the development of an adequate policy development network to ensure appropriate regional and program representation.

7. OUR PRIORITIES

Over the planning period, VAC will give first priority to fulfilling its long-standing commitment to those who matter the most through the course of each work day: veterans and other clients.

By this, we mean that VAC will:

- anticipate and understand the changing needs of its traditional war veterans and adapt its programs and services to contribute in the best way possible to their quality of life and well being;
- provide top quality services to its newer generation of Canadian Forces veterans by ensuring that programs and services address their special needs and circumstances;
- achieve the strategic priorities in this Plan without negative consequences to the quality of our current services to veterans and our other clients; and
- foster a culture of equal commitment to, and respect for, all clients.

VAC's 10 priorities directly link to its strategic objectives. Six of the priorities pertain to Objective 1 – Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement; and the four other priorities pertain to Objective 2 – Organizational Effectiveness. For each priority, VAC has assigned responsibility and accountability to one or more Officers of Primary Interest (OPI), whose job is to lead the work on this priority. The position titles of these OPIs are given for each of the priorities listed below.

OBJECTIVE 1 – INTEGRITY OF OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Services to Canadian Forces veterans (ADM Veterans Services)

VAC and the Department of National Defence have entered into discussions to determine how VAC's present menu of services and benefits for injured Canadian Forces members might be improved in response to quality of life concerns. While one of the first priorities

will be to clarify VAC's mandated role with regard to CF veterans, there are certain service improvements that VAC can begin to work on now.

A recent departmental review of the care needs of CF veterans has revealed some of the more pressing issues to be resolved:

- the need to adapt VAC's disability pension process to the needs of CF veterans so that disability assessments and subsequent access to rehabilitation and other forms of health care are greatly accelerated;
- the need for more and better trained VAC staff who can appropriately deal with CF veterans and their special circumstances within VAC's client-centred service approach; and
- making services available to assist CF veterans and their families with the transition from military to civilian life.

During the planning period, VAC will continue its collaboration with the Department of National Defence (DND) and its other partners to identify issues that VAC must address if it is to fulfil its mandated role with regard to CF veterans. Supported by the work being done by the Veterans Affairs Canada – Canadian Forces and Continuum of Service projects, the Department will soon prepare proposals and requirements for service improvement.

Commemoration (Executive Director, Public Affairs Branch)

The Department will continue its review of commemoration to explore ways of expanding VAC's national Commemoration Program, using an interdepartmental approach. Based on wide consultation with stakeholders, the Review will determine the vision, objectives and program adjustments which will define VAC's future involvement in commemoration. Issues related to how VAC's Commemoration Program will be expanded in recognition of Canada's peacekeeping role and how it will contribute to national priorities such as the Canadian identity and the education of youth will be addressed. So will future commitments to traditional involvement in organizing overseas pilgrimages to commemorative sites, the maintenance of cemeteries and battlefield memorials, funeral and burials assistance, the issue of medals and awards, and the organization of ceremonies to honour the sacrifices and achievements of Canadian veterans. The Review will be the first step in addressing program support issues and the need to align approved program activities with required funding, an area where the Department has experienced significant shortfalls in recent years. Review findings are expected during the first quarter of 2001.

Health care (ADM Veterans Services)

Our Service Approach

As VAC continues to explore the best ways of delivering its health care programs, it will remain committed to a Continuum of Service policy and a client-centred service approach. By this, we mean that VAC will involve the client as much as possible in determining his or her needs as well as in developing the best responses to those needs. As part of its case management process, the Department will strive to provide the best form of assistance to clients either through its menu of available programs and services or as the result of cooperative efforts with provincial and local agencies. Partnerships will be formed to optimize client access to services and will require the client's involvement in self-care and in health care planning decisions. In addition, VAC's service approach will strive to provide access to services from one central point and to include face-to-face contact with clients.

Maintaining this service commitment for aging veteran clients and for a new generation of Canadian Forces veterans will put a great deal of stress on many VAC staff. Area Counsellors, for example, already are carrying case loads that are beyond what is recommended for effective case management. Throughout the planning period, VAC will keep a close watch on the growing demand for counselling and other services, seeking additional resources, if required, to respond to increasing demand.

Partnerships

VAC has a strong and cooperative relationship with organizations that represent veterans and other clients. They are instrumental in guiding the Department in its program improvement initiatives and are invaluable partners in making our services more responsive to, and mindful of, client interests. VAC will strive to further strengthen its relationship with veterans' and other client organizations.

Managing client needs on a comprehensive basis also means that VAC has to emphasize effective partnerships within provincial health care systems and with community organizations. Such partnerships are of great importance in making proper referrals and providing a proper response when required services are either shared, or only available outside the Department. While all VAC regions have developed important partnership networks, there is more to be done to ensure their fuller development and greater integration into the VAC case management approach. VAC will strive to improve the management of its health partnerships.

Research Capacity

An important prerequisite to meeting the service expectations of its clients, and Canadian Forces veterans especially, is that VAC be equipped with the required research knowledge and expertise to assess their health conditions and then be able to provide them with the most appropriate and timely form of compensation, rehabilitation or health service benefit. VAC will focus on enhancing its research capacity and access to research that can strengthen its ability to meet these mandated responsibilities.

Health Care Coordination Initiative

The Health Care Coordination Initiative (HCCI) represents an important forum for VAC. It unites federal departments which are involved in providing health care services to clients and public servants. As such, it is often a testing ground for establishing policies and best practices that result in efficiencies and savings in the purchase of health care services and supplies. As a leading member and Chair of the Executive Committee, VAC is well positioned to champion an expanded role for the HCCI. For instance, the Initiative could align itself with national health priorities and the federal government's recently negotiated role as a partner in monitoring the comparative performance of Canada's various health sectors. VAC will encourage the expanded use of HCCI as the principal instrument to develop the Federal health services report card and as an important forum to assist in developing useful federal policies, positions and information. This outcome would contribute to VAC's strategic priority of offering greater input into national health policy.

Ste. Anne's Hospital (ADM Veterans Services)

Ste. Anne's Hospital, located in the western end of Montreal, is the last remaining federal hospital administered by VAC. This long-term care facility currently accommodates some 560 veteran patients. Recent efforts to transfer the facility to the province of Quebec and thereby secure the Hospital's long-term future have not proven successful. Nonetheless, the Province has expressed a willingness to explore partnership opportunities. Until such time as the Hospital's long-term future is clarified, its operations and the provision of quality care and services for veterans will remain a priority for Veterans Affairs. Over the next five years, VAC will pursue plans to renovate Ste. Anne's to upgrade the facility to federal and

provincial standards. This will improve services to veteran patients, and leave open the possibility of a future transfer to the Province. To further secure the Hospital's future, VAC will work toward recognition of the Hospital as a centre of excellence for the care of the aged and continue to seek enhanced partnerships between the Hospital and Quebec.

The disability pension process (ADM Veterans Services)

VAC has invested considerable time and energy during the past five years to improve its disability pension process. The dedicated efforts of staff have allowed VAC to cut by half processing time on most applications. These efforts have also resulted in useful service innovations. Recent consultations with veterans' organizations and client groups, however, have confirmed that there is still room for improvement. Over the planning period, VAC will take steps to further improve its performance in this program area by initiating a fundamental review of the disability pension process. In doing so, it will strive to find solutions to lingering client concerns. These centre on the fact that for many of our clients, VAC's disability pension process is still too complex and lengthy. The Review will also address ways of adapting the current process to better respond to the special needs and circumstances of Canadian Forces veterans. It is anticipated that this initiative will begin in 2001.

Information technology (IT)/Government On-Line (ADM Corporate Services)

During the planning period, the focus for information technology at VAC will be on rationalizing current information technologies used in the Department, introducing new Web-enabled technologies that improve client on-line access to our services in a secure, user-friendly fashion, and improving the electronic storage and retrieval of business information. Technology investments will be in support of the strategic directions contained in this Plan, with emphasis on investments and innovations that offer significant value for money and directly support the federal Government On-Line service initiative. Such investments will be made in the context of the Department's recently implemented information management/information technology Governance Model. VAC's emerging capacity to offer services on-line will not diminish its commitment to traditional services offered by telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings.

OBJECTIVE 2 – ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Strategic policy capacity (Deputy Minister)

Over the planning period, it will be important for VAC to become better connected with national and interdepartmental policy forums that deal with subject areas directly relevant to VAC's mandate and programs. The Department will benefit from this more direct engagement in strategic policy development, positioning it to contribute its historical experience and learn from the experiences of others involved in the creation and delivery of similar programs and services. As previously mentioned, VAC is well equipped to speak authoritatively on many seniors' health care, service delivery, compensation and national unity issues. To move ahead in this direction, VAC will have to strengthen its present strategic policy capacity. Over the 2001-2002 fiscal year, VAC will make modest organizational changes required to make this happen.

Human resources (ADM Corporate Services)

VAC will not be able to realise its corporate objectives and related strategic priorities without a credible Strategic Human Resources Plan that addresses important issues such as staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities, the need for greater diversity in the workplace, assistance for employees through the transition, employee counselling, and effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. It will also be incumbent on the Department to support government-wide strategic objectives related to Public Service renewal and to the Universal Classification System (UCS) and to ensure that its own human resources capacity is adjusted to meet the challenges ahead.

Strategic human resources planning will be one of the Department's top priorities over the next few years. Shaped within the context of VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan, this Strategic Human Resources Plan will be:

- Department-wide in scope and address VAC strategic priorities;
- continuous and result in a VAC human resources plan which will have a five-year outlook and which will be updated annually;

- action oriented with clearly defined long-range human resource management goals;
- based on appropriate VAC management input;
- integrated into VAC operational and business plans; and
- reviewed annually at which time human resource objectives and outcomes will be measured and reported.

Communications (Executive Director, Public Affairs Branch)

During recent years, VAC's communications capacity has been strained. In the near future this strain on communications resources is expected to continue as the Department attempts to:

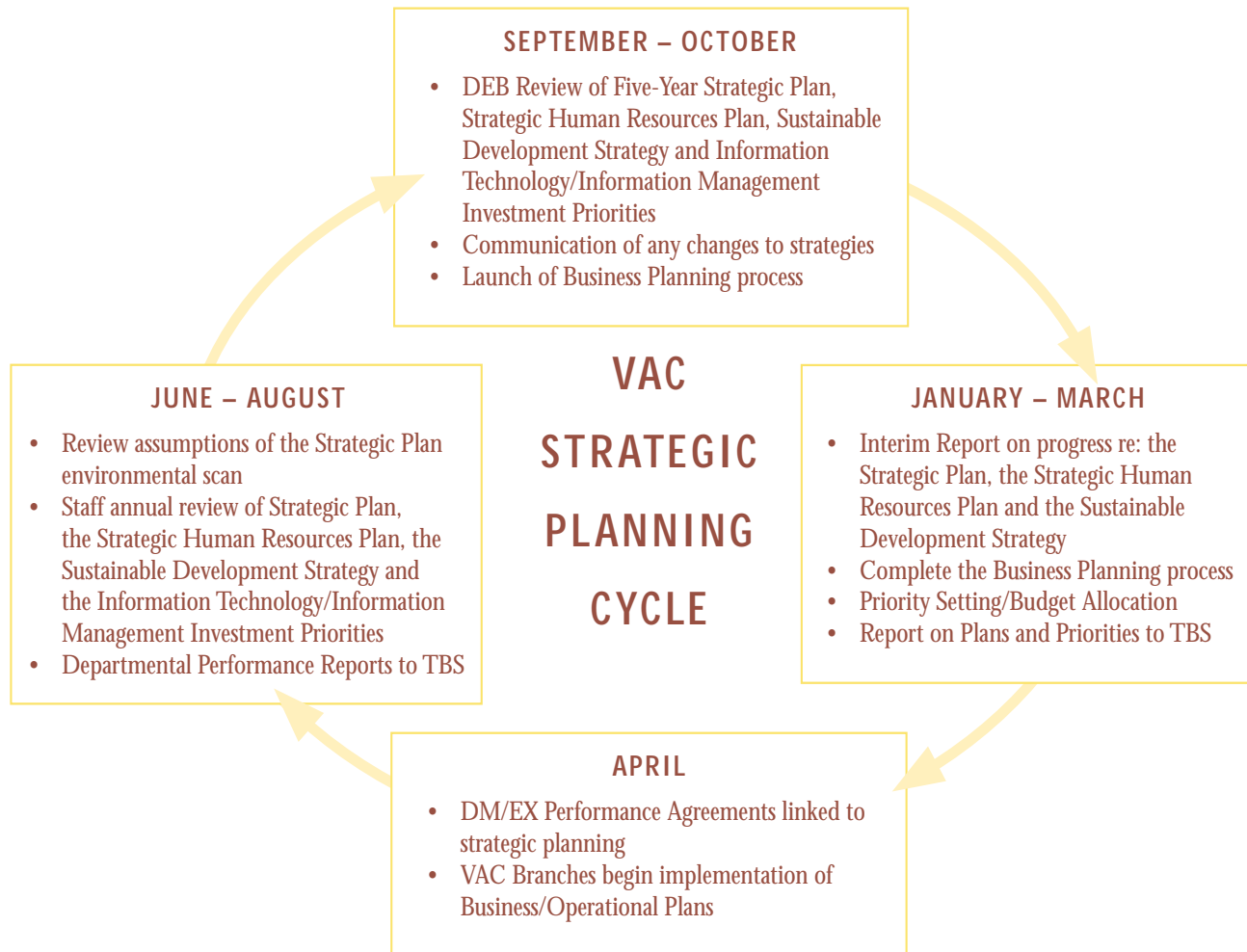
- improve communications with clients and make information on VAC programs more accessible;
- expand communications with the Canadian public as part of a growing Commemoration Program;
- respond to the increasing need to improve communications with VAC staff on ongoing program, systems and policy changes; and
- become more involved in strategic communications to improve the Department's profile inside and outside the public service.

Therefore, an immediate priority for VAC is to take steps to make sure that its communications function is appropriately defined, structured and staffed. This will be accomplished through an organizational review of the communications function to be completed in the spring of 2001, in parallel with the more extensive Review of Commemoration already under way.

Planning and resource allocation (DG Corporate Planning)

VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan will not be placed on a shelf and forgotten. It will become part of a continuous process that will guide business, human resources, information management/information technology and sustainable development planning in the Department.

Figure 3:
VAC Five-Year Strategic Planning Cycle and
Linkages to Business/Operational Plan



The illustration above shows how the VAC strategic plan will be updated on a cyclical basis and become part of VAC's overall planning and reporting process.

Priority setting

Each September, VAC will adjust and reaffirm its strategic priorities through a review of this Five-Year Strategic Plan, the VAC Strategic Human Resources Plan and the Department's Sustainable Development Strategy. The resulting strategic priorities will then guide VAC's business planning. Resulting operational objectives and goals will be measured, monitored and reported annually. VAC is committed to an in-depth strategic planning exercise every third year, resulting in the next comprehensive five-year strategic planning exercise occurring in 2003.

Reporting on progress

To keep the VAC strategic planning process open and accountable, the Department will report twice a year on progress in advancing our strategic priorities. The first time will be at the annual Strategic Planning Meeting of the Departmental Executive Board each September; the results of which will also be made available to employees. The second time will be at the end of each fiscal year when the report on progress will feed both the management performance review process and the Department's Performance Report to Parliament. Both of these reporting commitments will be made easier as a result of the previously noted designation of Officers of Primary Interest (OPIs) for each Strategic Priority contained in this Plan.

8. CONCLUSION

VAC's Strategic Plan is essentially a framework for implementing Veterans Affairs Canada's vision over the next five years. Built on the strength of an extensive study and wide consultation within and outside the Department, it addresses several strategic questions and issues of importance to stakeholders.

For veterans, other clients and veterans' organizations, it provides the assurance that VAC will do its utmost to improve programs and services to stay in step with their evolving needs and changing circumstances. It also reaffirms a commitment to maintain personalised services and not to compromise service quality due to any strategic initiatives within our Plan. Finally, it deals with many areas of concern including the need to improve communications with clients and address certain program shortcomings.

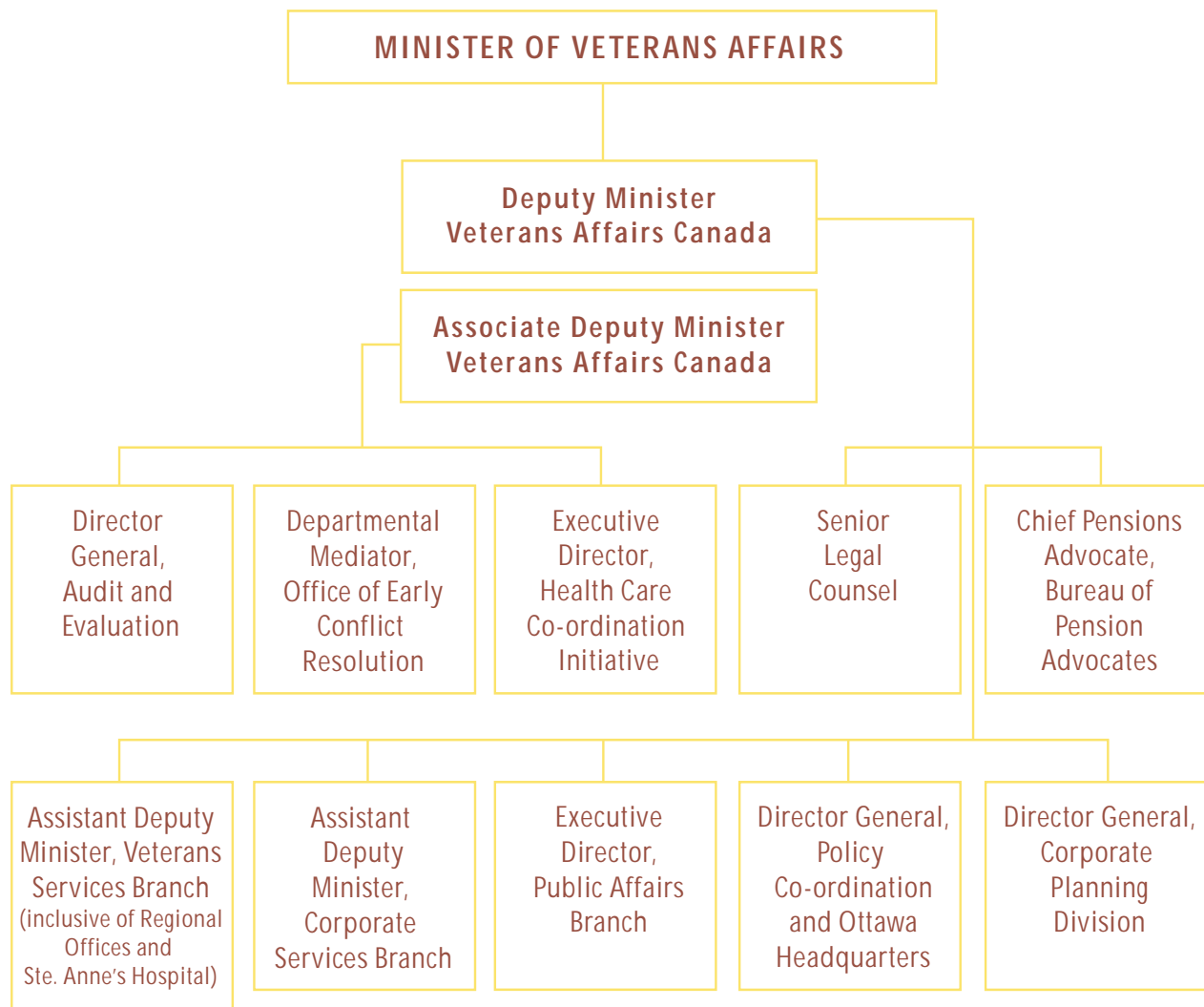
For VAC staff, the Plan provides the promise of a challenging, vibrant and caring workplace. It outlines VAC's commitment to improve training and learning opportunities, achieve balanced workloads and provide support for staff in adapting to change and achieving service improvement initiatives. Perhaps more importantly, the Plan provides direction. It gives employees a common understanding of the Department's mission, vision and values as well as the priorities which VAC will emphasize over the next five years.

For partners, it outlines VAC's future intention to strengthen its partnerships to improve the delivery of services, to share valuable information and to enable a larger departmental contribution in several research and strategic policy areas related to health care, benefits, seniors and other priorities contained in the Speech from the Throne.

For Canadians, this Plan represents a commitment from VAC, to them, that it will continue to honour and care for those who have served our country and who deserve their nation's thanks. It also reflects a clear commitment to do so with compassion, and in a manner that reflects the best available practices.

VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan will allow VAC to set in motion activities to meet Departmental priorities and to deal with the challenges of the future with confidence.

DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW



The Minister is responsible to Parliament for the Department of Veterans Affairs

HOW TO CONTACT VAC

Reader feedback

VAC would greatly appreciate your comments on this Five-Year Strategic Plan. We invite you to communicate your comments to the Corporate Planning Division at plan@vac-acc.gc.ca or the following address:

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General enquiries

Should you wish to make a general enquiry about VAC, its programs or services, please contact your nearest VAC district or regional office. You can find their locations and telephone numbers in the government pages of your local telephone directory.

VAC publications

VAC produces a variety of publications on its programs and services. Copies of all publications are available on our Web site (www.vac-acc.gc.ca). They may also be obtained from VAC district or regional offices across Canada and from the Communications Division, at the following address:

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