

Veterans Affairs Canada

Five-Year Strategic Plan 2009-2014



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

Canada

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 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. 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.

* Exemplary - serving as a desirable model.

Table of Contents

Message from Deputy Minister

1. About Veterans Affairs

- 1.1 An Overview
- 1.2 Where We Are Today

2. The Context for the Future

- 2.1 Risks and Challenges
- 2.2 Changes in Client Profile
- 2.3 Client Services
- 2.4 Remembrance Activities
- 2.5 The Economic Situation
- 2.6 Our Accountability as a Government Department
- 2.7 Public Service Renewal and VAC's Workforce

3. Where We Will be in 2014

4. Our Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 Transform Our Service Delivery and Support Functions to Meet the Needs of our Clients
- 4.2 Refocus Our Remembrance Activities
- 4.3 Support and Renew Our Workforce to Meet our Challenges
- 4.4 Strengthen Our Management, Transparency and Accountability

5. Moving Forward: What Does All This Mean

Annex A - Consultations

Deputy Minister's Message: Veterans Affairs Canada Strategic Plan 2009-2014



As we chart our course for the future, it is always useful to look to the lessons of the past. Sixty-five years ago, Canada faced tremendous challenges in balancing care for its First World War Veterans with a new wave of returning soldiers with needs we had yet to understand. Year after year, generation after generation, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), responded with programs and services to meet our Veterans needs at every stage in their lives.

That same spirit of service, commitment and respect for Canada's truest heroes will serve us well as Veterans Affairs Canada once again straddles the past and the future. Today, 2009 and beyond, the Department is evolving to meet the needs of modern Veterans and

Canadian Forces (CF) and RCMP members, while continuing to provide quality care and support to our aging war-service Veterans and their families.

It is in this context that I am proud to share with you the Veterans Affairs Canada Strategic Plan for 2009 to 2014. As you will see in the following pages, our priorities over the next five years focus on effective service delivery to our clients, defining our remembrance programming, supporting and renewing our workforce, and being accountable.

Our vision for 2014 is to be fully responsive to the diverse and changing needs of our clients. Veterans Affairs Canada will provide high quality service which honours the sacrifice and achievements of Canada's Veterans. And, the Department will deliver a remembrance program with a strong in-Canada focus and significant youth involvement. To help us fulfill this vision, VAC will have skilled staff strategically located, with the tools and knowledge they need to do their job to the best of their ability. The Department will work with service providers and partners to deliver on our mandate and will use technology to support informed decision-making and effective service delivery.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this document. Veterans Affairs Canada has a strong record of service to generations of men and women to whom we owe so much. With this plan, the Department sets a course to carry on that proud tradition.

Suzanne Tining
Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Canada

1. About Veterans Affairs

1.1 An Overview

Canada's development as an independent country with a unique identity stems largely from its achievements in times of war. 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 affected 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.

The mandate for Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) comes from laws and regulations. Among the more significant is the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, which gives the Minister of Veterans Affairs 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 dependents or survivors of any person referred to ..."

Through an Order in Council, Veterans Affairs Canada is responsible to keep alive the achievements and sacrifices made by those who served Canada in times of war and peace.

The Department supports and cares for Canada's Veterans and other eligible clients by ensuring they receive needed benefits and services to which they are entitled in a timely fashion and by recognizing their service and sacrifices through a wide range of remembrance activities. The programs and services provide for hardships arising from disabilities and lost economic opportunities, health and social services, professional legal assistance, and recognition of the achievements and sacrifices of Canadians during periods of war and conflict.

Veterans Affairs Canada's diverse group of clients reflect the size of Canada's contribution to world peace. Our clients include:

Veterans:

- a. Armed Forces and Merchant Navy Veterans who served during the First World War, Second World War and Korean War;
- b. Former and, in certain cases, current members of the Canadian Forces (CF), including those who served in Special Duty Areas and in peacekeeping; and
- c. Allied Veterans of the First World War, Second World War or the Korean War who lived in Canada prior to periods of war, or moved to Canada after the War and have lived here for at least 10 years.

Other Clients:

- a. Civilians who are entitled to benefits because of their war-time services;
- b. Former and, in certain cases, serving members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP); and
- c. Survivors and dependents.

1.2 Where we are today

Veterans Affairs Canada is a medium-sized department with approximately 4,000 employees across Canada. The headquarters is in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, with a network of more than 60 sites across Canada, including Ste. Anne's Hospital, providing and coordinating service delivery. VAC works overseas to support awareness and maintain Canada's commemorative sites.

The Department provides and coordinates a range of programs and services that support the care, treatment, independence and re-establishment in civilian life of eligible Veterans and other clients to assist them in achieving their optimum level of well-being. For our traditional clients, VAC offers an income supplement program (War Veterans Allowance), disability pensions, and three major health care programs; the Veteran Independence Program which helps Veterans remain healthy and independent in their own homes or communities; residential care for Veterans, primarily in contracted facilities in or near their own communities; and treatment benefits and personalized health care services, including services for those clients who suffer from mental health conditions. This also includes medical and dental care, prescription drugs and home adaptations. Some of this support continues to be available to the survivor of a Veteran after his or her death. For the CF Veteran, the New Veterans Charter (NVC), implemented in 2006, offers a range of programs including rehabilitation, financial benefits, health care, disability awards and job placement to ease transition to civilian life, all supported by comprehensive case management.

Changing client profiles and needs bring many challenges in the delivery of our programs, a trend that will continue over this five-year planning period. Even though their numbers are decreasing, the needs of war-service clients are increasing as they age. At the same time, the needs of our newer clients under the NVC are also increasing, both in terms of numbers and type of their health-care needs resulting from today's modern warfare and security environment.

Canadians have now seen their forces deployed in Afghanistan as part of a NATO operation in that country for a longer period than for either of the two World Wars. Over this period, the interest of Canadians in the operations of their armed forces has grown considerably. VAC benefits and services in support of the Canadian Forces, including the members who are serving in Afghanistan, are provided under the New Veterans Charter.

The combined effect of all of these changes has already begun to drive a change in the Department's approach for the delivery and coordination of services and programs, as it adjusts to changing client profiles, needs and locations.

Remembrance programming continues to be one of our priorities. It, like our client base, is evolving and we must continue to seek opportunities to not only honour the sacrifices of those who have served in the past, but also of those who continue to serve Canada now and in the future.

2. The Context for the Future

2.1 Risks and Challenges

There are a number of risks and challenges that must be dealt with over the planning period. In terms of services to clients, this includes the rapid change in client profile, the associated questions in projecting workload, and being responsive in bringing the required changes to our service delivery network.

The risks associated with renewing our workforce include the potential loss of Departmental knowledge as experienced staff retire, as well as the challenges of successfully attracting, training, positioning and keeping new employees.

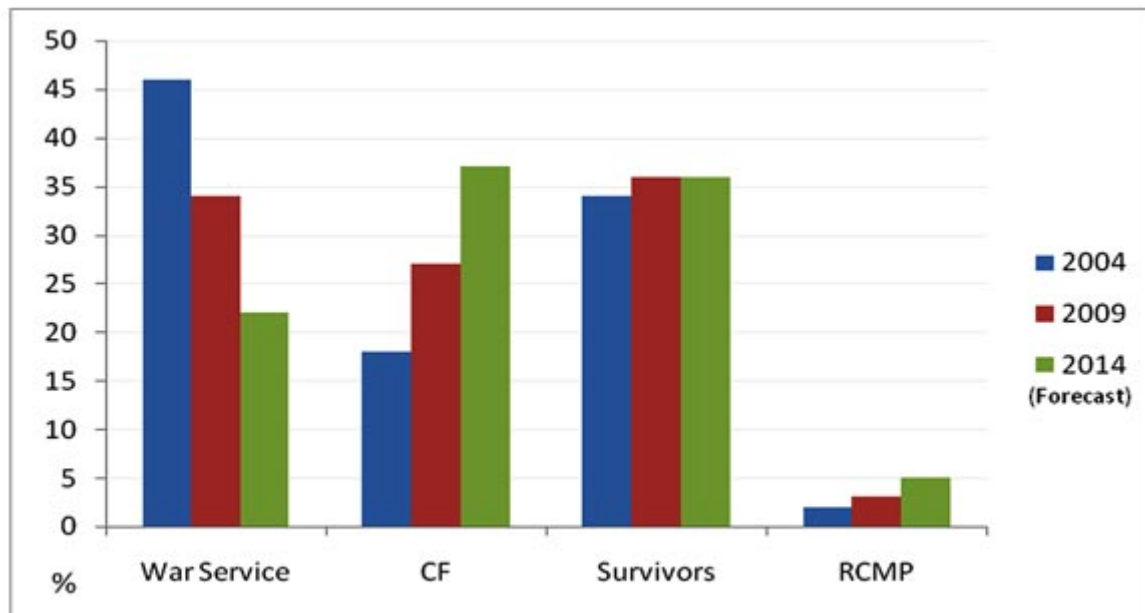
In managing the Department, there are a number of government-driven improvements in management processes, transparency and accountability that must be addressed. On the technology front, there is a need to improve the use of technology in knowledge management and to improve the flow of electronic information, both internally and externally.

2.2 Changes in Client Profile

As of March 31, 2009, Veterans Affairs Canada provided benefits and services to approximately 219,150 clients (Table 1 - VAC Clients). Of these, 34 percent were war service Veterans; 36 percent surviving family members of Veterans; 27 percent Canadian Forces members and Veterans; and 3 percent members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

The balance between these major client groups will change over the next 10 years. The vast majority of war Veterans and their survivors are in their 80s and 90s. They are coping with increasingly serious health issues that require ever-increasing attention. The number of war-service clients will decline as these older veterans pass away, while the number of Canadian Forces clients looking to Veterans Affairs Canada for support will increase.

Table 1 - Percentage of VAC Clients



Textual Version

Table 1 – A forecast of how Veterans Affairs Canada's major client groups will change over the next ten years.

VAC Clients	2004	2009	2014
War Service	46%	34%	22%
Canadian Forces	18%	27%	37%
Survivors	34%	36%	37%
RCMP	2%	3%	5%

The number of Canadian Forces members who have served in peacekeeping and other international operations has increased significantly in recent years. The danger, pace and intensity in military operations has resulted in a growing need for care and treatment for service-related physical and mental health conditions. The overall numbers are much smaller than for VAC's traditional war-service clients; however, treatment for many of the newer clients, particularly for mental health, can be more complex and much more time consuming.

These changes in client profile affect remembrance programming. Canada Remembers faces challenges in adapting its programs to meet the unique needs of CF Veterans, many of whom do not see themselves as Veterans. Our goal is to help them accept

their Veteran status and to get them involved in remembrance activities as recipients of recognition not just participants.

RCMP members live and work in a unique culture and also face new challenges relating to modern-day threats and conflicts. VAC currently provides support to some 7,000 RCMP clients and the RCMP is involved in ongoing discussions with us regarding the services provided to them.

The client numbers alone do not provide a complete picture. Based on our experience to date, the service needs of individual Veterans under care will continue to increase. This changing client profile is already beginning to influence a major change within the Department. It is anticipated that by 2012, the number of CF members and Veterans receiving treatment and support will outnumber the traditional war Veterans receiving benefits.

It will be very important to make sure the right staff is in the right place at the right time, with enough skills and expertise to deliver services as needed. We will continue to work closely with DND and stakeholders to be prepared for the projected end of the military combat mission in Afghanistan in 2011.

The delivery of services under the New Veterans Charter is still in its early stages, and therefore, the preparation of reliable predictions of client workload is a challenge. Services are tailored to more individual needs than in the past and are built around an individual case management approach for our clients who have an identified need. Caseload management will need to continually change as we gain experience.

The changing client profile will have an impact on Ste. Anne's Hospital, the only remaining hospital owned and operated by the Department. The hospital offers specialized mental health services in addition to long-term care and day-support services. Service delivery through Ste. Anne's Hospital will need to be reviewed in light of present and projected client requirements.



2.3 Client Services

Our service delivery workload will need to be carefully watched as we make changes to the locations of our service delivery network and as the needs of our clients change. Resources will be tight and it will be very important to maximize both efficiency and effectiveness. Up to 40% of our health care staff will be eligible to retire in the next five years. The combination of these factors means that we need to develop a service delivery model that is agile, flexible, and able to adapt quickly to changes in demands for services.

The development of a service delivery model and operations plan will be key in deciding the overall makeup of the Department for the future. The plan will help identify the core expertise that must be maintained within the Department and that which can be contracted with the private sector or other levels of government. The role of Ste. Anne's Hospital and its place in the future service delivery model will have to be studied. A strategy will be necessary to guide the changes over the next five years.

There is a growing demand for information technology to serve the workplace with modern, dynamic and user-friendly information technology (IT) and information management (IM) systems. The Department will look for opportunities to improve electronic information sharing with Department of National Defence (DND), and to assist in improving our own internal knowledge management.

We rely on health and other client information collected from various sources for the ongoing management of our programs and in the delivery of services to our clients. For the most part, our processes are supported by hard-copy paper records. The Department will move toward adapting to electronic records management and accessing available electronic information.

We recognize the benefits and streamlining that can be achieved by working more closely with others and through the development of partnerships with other levels of government. We are working with DND to provide a continuum of mental health services to CF clients. These services are also available to other clients suffering from mental health issues. The Joint Network for Operational Stress Injuries between VAC and DND ensures clients across the country have access to the mental health services they require, as close to their own communities as possible. The Department will continue to seek partnerships with other service providers.

There are several organizations that represent our Department's clients. Ongoing contact with these organizations, as well as with other stakeholder and interest groups, is important as it provides access to important issues with the client community as well as a meaningful source of feedback. We have a long-standing relationship with many of these organizations; however, we will expand our network to ensure that the expectations and needs of Canada's newer and younger CF Veterans, as well as Canadians more generally, are sought out and taken into account.

2.4 Remembrance Activities

The Veterans Affairs Canada Remembers Program is designed to honour all those who served Canada in the cause of peace, ensuring that meaningful remembrance activities continue into the future and that all Canadians, especially young people, value and recognize the achievements and sacrifices of Canadian Veterans and war dead.

Year after year, Canadians demonstrate their pride and respect through acts of remembrance at national, regional and community levels. We play a leadership role in bringing remembrance to Canadians where they live, work and study. We also help to engage Canadians through community projects and national and international commemorative ceremonies. The Canada Remembers program calls on all Canadians, young and old, to honour our shared heritage, to recognize with pride our place in world history and to come together in remembrance. Like interest in Canadian Forces operations, Canadian interest and participation in remembrance activities has grown substantially over the past several years. Consultation and participation is a major cornerstone of remembrance activities. The greater involvement of CF Veterans is a very important element of remembrance and will become even more important given that opportunities for the active participation by war Veterans are declining. Discussions with our DND partners and Canadians will continue to ensure the proper recognition of modern day Veterans. Remembrance is a priority for Canadians and the Department is sensitive to the need to ensure that the future approach respects the traditions of the past but also reflects the realities of the Veterans of today.

In addition, reaching youth on their level requires expansion of technological resources such as social networking tools and viral marketing. Our evolving youth and learning strategy places an emphasis on on-line interaction.

The Department also works with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to maintain the graves of approximately 117,000 Canadian war dead in more than 80 countries. With the recently completed restoration of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and highly publicized events in Europe, there has been an increased awareness of Canada's commemorative sites overseas. The ongoing maintenance of the 14 memorials in Europe will require smart financial planning and budgeting. The Funeral and Burial Program will continue to be administered by the Last Post Fund Corporation to ensure that eligible Veterans and other individuals receive a dignified funeral and burial.

2.5 The Economic Situation

The Government of Canada can expect to experience a period of severe resource constraint over this planning period. It is too early to assess how serious the global economic recession is likely to become, or how long it is likely to last. This economic reality will have an impact not only on the Department as an organization, but also on its clients who may find themselves looking to VAC programs in times of economic need.

It will be important to make sure an appropriate resource planning, management and reporting framework be in place to allow the Department to achieve the best use of its resources. Resource pressures, in all likelihood, will have to be funded through internal resource changes.

2.6 Our Accountability as a Government Department

Veterans Affairs Canada must contribute to Government of Canada priorities and projects intended to strengthen management, openness and accountability both in Government and within the public service. These include the requirements of the *Federal Accountability Act* and the many other policies and programs designed to improve management practices and accountability, including financial management policies, an Accounting Officer / Chief Financial Officer (CFO) model preparing the Department for an external audit of its annual financial statements, a new Internal Audit Policy and a new Policy on Evaluation.

These are mandated Government and central agency priorities and given their scope and complexity, will require a great deal of attention by senior management. The projects will be expensive to implement and, for the most part, will have to be completed using existing resources.

The Department has already created the positions of CFO and Chief Audit Executive and has put in place a Departmental Audit Committee. Priority will now be given to strengthening the financial management, internal audit and program evaluation functions. These policies bring changes to the way all senior managers will be expected to manage and control their resources, including the annual sign-off on formal Statements of Internal Control.

The Department has also completed the review of its programs and is making progress in linking resources to program activities and results achieved. Given the shortage of resources, it will be important to make sure that performance management of the Department's services to its clients is something that can be measured. This is especially true for services that will be delivered by outside third parties through partnerships and contracts.

2.7 Public Service Renewal and VAC's Workforce

The Public Service of Canada is in the process of renewing itself because of changing demographics. Public Service Renewal is not only about recruiting the right people for our service-delivery needs; it is also about keeping and developing our mid-career employees, and supporting our employees who are planning their retirements. As a significant proportion of our workforce is eligible for retirement in the next 5 to 10 years, there is a need to create a long-term strategy to allow for the transfer of knowledge by keeping experienced employees, and embracing new ideas through new recruits. In an increasingly diverse nation, the need to have a workforce which reflects the changing face of Canada is an important part of renewal and is a continuing priority for VAC.

At VAC, we value our diverse workforce, and our approach to client service with its emphasis on excellence, leadership and teamwork. Hiring the right staff with the right qualifications, and keeping them trained and working at the points of service delivery will be important. We will need to invest in technology to make sure that our managers and employees have the right tools to do their jobs well. Our human resource needs will have to be well understood and worked into our service model for the future.

Changes in the client profile will influence the skills required by VAC. The locations of clients will change and this will influence the location of our offices. We will also see staff continue to be more involved in managing and overseeing services which, are delivered through partnerships and third-party arrangements.

3. Where We Will Be in 2014

In 2014, VAC will be fully responsive to our diverse and changing client needs. Our technology and e-systems will provide the information we need to make informed management decisions, and support effective and accessible multi-channel service delivery. The Department will use fact-based decision making to support policy and program design. Skilled staff will be located where they should be, have the tools and knowledge they need to do their job and work effectively with other service providers and partners in delivering our mandate. Our remembrance programming will be relevant and have strong CF Veteran and youth involvement. There will also be an in-Canada focus with emphasis placed on interactive on-line experiences which will involve Canadians in learning about Canada's history and its Veterans. We will be accountable managers. Overall, VAC will provide high quality service which honours the sacrifice and achievements of our clients.

To achieve our vision for 2014, we commit to:

- a. A multi-channel service model made better through technology and partnerships which responds to the changing needs of our clients now and into the future;
- b. Strong leadership in Canada's remembrance activities;
- c. An involved, competent and diverse workforce; and
- d. Efficient, open and accountable program management.



4. Our Strategic Priorities

While our mandate will not change, our client profile is already changing as is the nature and mix of benefits and services needed by our clients. Our workforce will evolve as well as our service model to meet the needs of our changing group of clients. Remembrance programs will also adapt as Canada's war Veterans grow older and Canada's new Veterans emerge.

We must be committed to this renewal and change on all fronts. No area of the Department will be left untouched. Our strategic priorities for the next five years are the following:

4.1 Transform Our Service Delivery and Support Functions to Meet the Needs of our Clients

4.1.1 Ensure a service delivery model and operations plan that will define how the Department needs to be organized and resourced, including Ste. Anne's Hospital, and corporate and other internal support services.

4.1.2 Harmonize policies, programs, services with DND to ensure seamless transition from military to civilian life.

4.1.3 Design a sound and reliable plan for client and workload forecasting which reflects the case management approach to service delivery.

4.1.4 Use evidence and our growing research ability to explore improvements in the delivery of programs and services to clients with an emphasis on a residential care strategy, a mental health strategy, and strengthened case management services including improved on-line accessibility and Web-based technology.

4.1.5 Pursue benefits and streamlining through strategic partnerships with other government organizations and/or other levels of government.

4.1.6 Evaluate service delivery under the New Veterans Charter to ensure that the programs are achieving their intended outcomes.

4.1.7 Put in place a strategy to manage change that uses communication tools to keep employees, clients, stakeholders and partners up-to-date on the restructuring and transformation of our service model.

4.2 Refocus Our Remembrance Activities

4.2.1 Continue to consult with CF and traditional Veterans, CF members, stakeholders and Canadians to ensure remembrance activities reflect how they and Canadians wish to see Canadian Veterans honoured and recognized.

4.2.2 Address the recognition needs of the CF Veteran (how to specifically honour their service and involve them in remembrance activities) as a priority.

4.2.3 Increase the focus on in-Canada remembrance activities while maintaining international commitments with an international presence.

4.2.4 Take remembrance activities to Canadians rather than taking Canadians to remembrance activities through effective use of partnerships and technology.

4.2.5 Build on activities aimed at youth and develop and strengthen youth involvement strategy.

4.3 Support and Renew our Workforce to Meet our Challenges

4.3.1 Identify the human resource needs, including core skills and ability in both official languages, for the future service delivery model.

4.3.2 Create plans that ensure the right staff with the right qualifications are hired, trained, positioned and kept at the appropriate points of service delivery.

4.3.3 Implement a departmental multi-year human resources management approach to guide the preparation of integrated human resource and business plans.

4.3.4 Help employees as they work through the opportunities and challenges presented by the changes in the Department.

4.3.5 Use and emphasize human resource management strategies to build on our representation of Canadian diversity.

4.3.6 Work together with operational units and stakeholders to develop a learning strategy based on the needs of the Department and the various operational units.

4.3.7 Make sure that employees are informed and involved in order to better serve our clients' changing needs.

4.4 Strengthen our Management, Transparency and Accountability

4.4.1 Implement the new financial management, internal audit and evaluation policies.

4.4.2 Strengthen our performance management to make sure programs and services are effectively delivered.

4.4.3 Respond to the rapidly growing demand for information technology to serve the workplace of the future.

4.4.4 Build on our capability and capacity for knowledge management internally, and with the CF, RCMP and other partners and service providers.

4.4.5 Continue to improve the sound management of the Department through the Management Accountability Framework and parliamentary reporting process.

5. Moving Forward: What does all this Mean?

The Department is facing a period of change and renewal. There are immediate, medium and long-term planning priorities that flow from this strategic plan. These priorities will be linked to our departmental Integrated Business and Human Resource Plan, and in turn, to branch and divisional integrated plans.

Our strategic plan and our Integrated Business and Human Resource Plans will guide our transformation and our performance over the next five years. Together, they will be used to assist executives and managers throughout the organization to set and achieve common priorities and to establish individual performance agreements to help monitor our progress.

Implementation of this strategic plan will be under the direction of the Deputy Minister and will be coordinated through the VAC Senior Management Committee. It will be monitored through an annual review and updated to ensure the various priorities are validated or adjusted as required.

The consultation that led to the development of the strategic plan has provided an opportunity to collect comments and questions, both internally and externally. The feedback received will be shared with senior management and used for annual operational reports to support our strategic priorities. Employees will continue to be well informed and involved in the implementation of strategies aligned with our strategic plan.

The next five years will present many challenges, but it will also be an exciting journey with opportunities to successfully adapt and learn as we strive to meet our strategic priorities and our vision for 2014.

Annex A – Consultations

The development of a strategic plan is an important process. It sets our course and guides our transformation over the next five years. Consultation and engagement with employees, community and key stakeholders was incorporated in the *Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Five-Year Strategic Plan 2009-2014*. The preparation of the plan consisted of three phases:

Phase I: Document review.

An environmental scan was prepared, most recent versions of the Reports on Plans and Priorities and Departmental Performance Reports, program delivery issues and assessments, and new policies and trends. Client demographic information, the Speech from the Throne, Budget 2009 and the Government's Economic Update were also reviewed.

Phase II: Development of the consultation draft.

Consultations were held with senior management, line departments and agencies including the Department of National Defense and the Canadian Forces, Department of Health, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Canadian Heritage, and the RCMP, and with Central Agencies including Privy Council Office, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Finance.

Certain communities of practice were also consulted including: National Employment Equity Advisory Committee (NEEAC), Employee Council, and the New Professionals group.

Phase III: Distribution of the consultation draft.

The draft plan was distributed to all employees, line departments previously consulted, Central Agencies, and stakeholder organizations. Responses were logged and the plan was amended to reflect the comments made.