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*LIFE AFTER SERVICE STUDIES (LASS) SECONDARY ANALYSIS  
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## **Contact with Veterans Not in Receipt of VAC Benefits – Data from the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life**

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## Research Questions (Request)

1. Of those Veterans not in receipt of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) benefits, how many have contacted VAC?
2. How many Veterans who may be eligible for benefits have contacted VAC?

## Background

The Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Report on Regular Force Veterans, January 4, 2011, found that:

*“Those not receiving benefits from VAC were similar to Canadians in the general population in many respects, but on average had higher rates of some chronic conditions and disability, and significant rates of attributing both to military service, suggesting VAC program reach issues and/or unmet needs.”*

This raises questions about whether some Veterans who believe they have service-related disabilities have come forward but were denied benefits and whether other Veterans who might be eligible have not approached VAC. The objectives of this secondary analysis of the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life data were to determine how many Veterans not receiving benefits contacted VAC, and how many of those reported chronic health conditions that they attributed to their military service.

## Method

The Survey on Transition to Civilian Life conducted in 2010<sup>1</sup> included three client status groups as of March 2009, with oversampling of VAC clients:

- NVC clients - VAC clients in receipt of programs, benefits and services under the New Veterans Charter (*Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Reestablishment and Compensation Act*), including Disability Awards, Rehabilitation, Earnings Loss, Career Transition Services, Canadian Forces Income Support and Health Insurance);
- DP clients - VAC clients in receipt of a Disability Pension under the *Pension Act* who were not receiving benefits or services under the NVC; and
- Non-clients - Veterans not receiving VAC benefits.

**Contact with VAC** was established when a Veteran had a client identity number added to the Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN). Generally when a Veteran contacts VAC for the first time, they are added to CSDN and a client identity number is system generated. Basic information (e.g., surname, first name, middle name, language of preference and gender) is added to the file. Other information is added at the time, if appropriate, including telephone numbers, date of birth, date of death, interrelationships and service identifiers.

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1 Thompson JM, MacLean MB, Van Til L, Sudom K, Sweet J, Poirier A, Adams J, Horton V, Campbell C, Pedlar D. Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Report on Regular Force Veterans. Research Directorate, Veterans Affairs Canada, Charlottetown, and Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Department of National Defence, Ottawa. 04 January 2011:103 p.

**Application for benefits** was determined by the existence of a file number. A file number is assigned when a Veteran makes application for VAC benefits or services and identity must be verified. A download of all VAC client identity numbers and service numbers from the Reporting Data Base as of October 2009 was linked to file numbers downloaded as of May 2009. This data was subsequently linked to the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life 2010 share data (3,154 Regular Force Veterans released from 1998 to 2007) using service numbers.

The **population who may be eligible for benefits** was defined as Veterans who reported at least one chronic condition or disability and who attributed their condition or disability to military service. Survey respondents were asked about a number of chronic health conditions that had lasted or were expected to last six months or more and that had been diagnosed by a health professional. Both physical and mental conditions were included in the definition of **at least one chronic condition**. Physical health conditions included hearing problems, arthritis, back problems, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, bowel disorder, ulcers, cancer, diabetes, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Mental health conditions included mood disorders, depression/anxiety, anxiety disorder and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

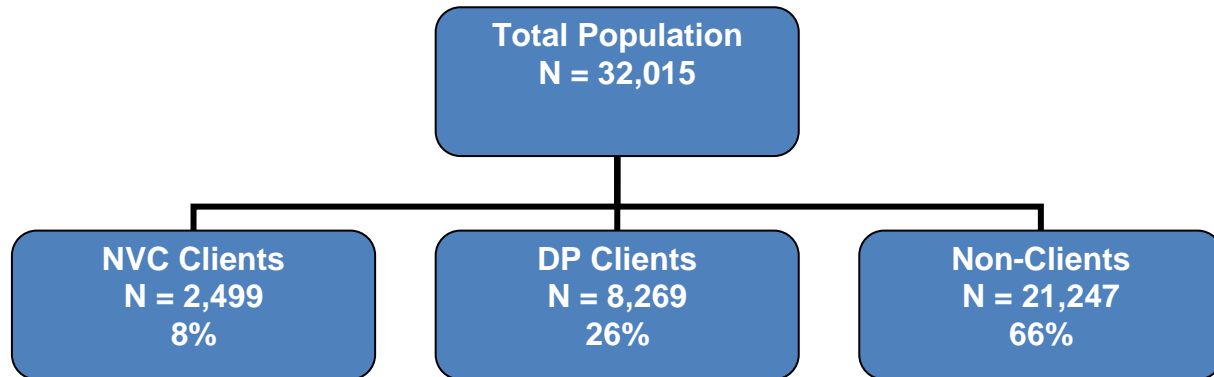
**Disability or participation and activity limitation** was derived from a series of questions on activity limitation. It includes those who reported being limited (sometimes or often) in selected activities (home, school, work and other activities) because of a physical condition, mental condition or health problem which had lasted or had been expected to last six months or longer.

**Attribution to service** was derived in one of two ways: (1) Each chronic health condition question was followed by the question, "Do you think this condition is related to military service?" (2) Those who reported participation and activity limitation were asked for the best description of the cause of their condition and were provided with a list of options of which military work conditions was one.

## Results

Two-thirds (66%) of the CF Regular Force Veterans who released from service between 1998 and 2007 were not VAC clients as of March 2009 (Figure 1). Of those, over one-third (36%) had contact with VAC at some point, and 21% had also applied for benefits (Table 1).

**Figure 1: Survey on Transition to Civilian Life, Population\* of VAC Clients and Non-clients**



\* Weighted population estimates.

A subset of the non-clients (43%) had a chronic condition or disability that they attributed to military service. This group was more likely than overall non-clients to have contacted VAC and applied for benefits. More than half (52%) of them had contacted VAC compared to 36% of all non-clients (Table 1), and 35% of them had applied for benefits compared to 21% of all non-clients.

**Table 1: Survey on Transition to Civilian Life Non-Clients Who May Be Eligible for Benefits**

	Total		Contacted VAC		Contacted VAC and Applied for Benefits	
	Pop* (1)	% of all Non-Clients	Pop*	% of Col (1)	Pop*	% of Col (1)
Non-Clients	21,247	100%	7,618	36%	4,363	21%
Non-clients who May be Eligible for Benefits**	9,082	43%	4,748	52%	3,203	35%

\* Weighted population estimates.

\*\* Reported at least one chronic condition or disability and who attributed their condition or disability to military service.

## Discussion

More than one-third (36%) of the CF Regular Force Veterans who released from 1998-2007 and who were not VAC clients at the time of the survey had in fact approached VAC. Of those, 21% went as far as applying for VAC benefits. Over two-thirds (68%) of non-clients who may be eligible for benefits who contacted VAC had applied for benefits.

This analysis does not indicate *why* non-clients with chronic health conditions or disability who approached VAC were not receiving VAC benefits. Authors' hypotheses include:

- Some might not have pursued claims.
- Some claims might have been in process at the time of the survey.
- Some claims might have been denied.

This analysis also does not provide insight into why non-clients with health conditions or disability did not approach VAC. Authors' hypotheses include:

- Not being aware of potential eligibility.
- Not wanting to apply for various reasons, including concerns about being able to supply sufficient evidence of service relationship, or the burden associated with application for benefits.

### **Further Study**

It is unknown how many applied for benefits and were denied. As VAC administrative data on benefit applications is claims based not person oriented, establishing the claims history of a particular individual would require significant work using VAC's administrative database. Alternatively, a random sample of files could be manually reviewed to estimate the proportion of the population that applied and was denied benefits.

Some non-clients may have subsequently become clients, and some may have contacted VAC or applied for benefits. Linking the survey respondents to more recent data on client status and contact would determine how many.

### **Conclusion**

More than a third (36%) of CF Regular Force Veterans who released during 1998-2007 who were not in receipt of VAC benefits as of March 2009 had approached VAC and 21% had also applied for benefits. Many non-clients reported chronic conditions or disability that they attributed to military service. This group were more likely than all non-clients to have contacted VAC and to have applied for benefits.

### **Interpretation Guidance**

- The results cannot be generalized to all Veterans as the findings represent only a sub-component of the Veteran population (Regular Force Veterans released from 1998 to 2007).
- The proportion of the study population that contacted VAC is likely understated as only those with a client identity number and service number were considered to have contacted VAC.

## **Requestor(s)**

During a briefing on the results of the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life in December 2010, the Associate Deputy Minister asked how many non-clients had come forward but were denied VAC benefits. While this report examines how many contacted VAC and applied for benefits, further study is required to determine how many were denied VAC benefits.

During a knowledge exchange session held on January 7, 2011, and interviews with Transformation project leads during January and February 2011, there were many questions about the non-clients and why those who have approached VAC are not clients.