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Client Experiences with Veterans Affairs Canada Rehabilitation Program and Case Management Services

Executive Summary

Prepared by:
Corporate Research Associates Inc.

Prepared for:
Veterans Affairs Canada

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To support improvements to service delivery and policy development, in the spring of 2017 Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) conducted the VAC National Survey 2017 to obtain feedback from War Service Veterans, CAF Veterans and Members, RCMP Veterans and survivors who were either in receipt of benefits or who had applied for a benefit in the last 12 months. While the survey demonstrated overall satisfactory results, aspects of the Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program and Case Management Services received lower ratings. As such, further exploration was needed to better understand the reasons for lower satisfaction levels.

In January 2019 VAC commissioned Corporate Research Associates Inc. (CRA) to conduct qualitative research with Veterans who took part in the 2017 VAC National Survey. The goal of this study was to explore areas of lower satisfaction from the 2017 VAC National Survey, specifically related to the Case Management Services and the Rehabilitation Program. A total of 29 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted from February 27, 2019 to April 2, 2019.

Research objectives:

- Explore clients' perceived experiences with their engagement in the Rehabilitation Program and/or Case Management Services;
- Identify the facilitators and barriers to clients' participation in the Rehabilitation Program and/or Case Management Services;
- Identify the facilitators and barriers to clients' completion of the Rehabilitation Program and/or Case Management Services.

The study also sought to make recommendations for survey items on future iterations of the VAC National Survey, and future research to support the development, management and improvement of programs and services for Veterans and their families.

Findings from this qualitative research study will be used to increase VAC's understanding of clients' experiences with these specific programs/services, inform the development of survey items on future iterations of the VAC National Survey, and inform future research to support the development, management and improvement of programs and services provided to Veterans and their families. Qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. As such, results are directional only and cannot be projected to the overall population under study.



What Did Veterans Tell Us?

Transitioning from Military to Civilian Life

Veterans begin their case management experience at a time of physical pain, mental instability, with trepidation and uncertainty for their future. This and the fact that military culture is significantly different than civilian culture defines particular needs for the Veteran.

Awareness and Understanding of VAC's Services and Programs

Veterans are often unaware of, or do not understand the suite of VAC's programs and services available to them, and are unsure where to access this information. This is sometimes a function of the Veteran's personal physical and mental circumstances that make it difficult to absorb and navigate information and sometimes a function of the complexity of VAC's system. Often both factors are at play. Therefore, Veterans want a clear and structured Case Plan. This points to the need for clear, complete, direct and accessible information, delivered pro-actively to the Veteran and it emphasizes the need for the Case Manager to act as both an advocate and a navigator for the Veteran for both VAC programs and community resources.

Case Manager Role - Characteristics, Knowledge and Skill Set

Veterans do not fully understand the Case Manager role and experience variability in quality and experience levels in Case Managers. Veterans identify key qualities and ideal characteristics as: being empathetic, understanding, caring, having excellent listening skills and an ability to build rapport. Veterans expect that Case Managers will be knowledgeable about all of VAC's benefits and services and will proactively communicate this information to Veterans. There is the perception among some Veterans that Case Managers may withhold information, thus acting as gate-keepers.

Working Relationship Between Veteran and Case Manager

Veterans want direct access to their Case Manager and they want continuity in the working relationship. Change is experienced as disruptive and potentially harmful to the Veterans' well-being. Veterans express a fear of the future and seek a safety net, sometimes expressed as a desire to retain Case Management services and remain in the Rehabilitation program, even when the Veteran is deemed well enough to cease services.

Experiences with Rehabilitation Services and Vocational Assistance Program

Veterans have experienced excellent outcomes as a result of participating in medical, psychosocial and vocational rehabilitation programs, however Veterans identified issues in the program that stem from both individual and structural (VAC) sources. The connection between rehabilitation and financial security is one that requires further exploration. This and Veterans' fear of the future and want of a safety net, combined with what is perceived as a lack of accountability may account for Veterans remaining in the Rehabilitation program even when they are determined to be well. Veterans have good awareness of medical and psychosocial rehabilitation programs, but not for vocational rehabilitation. Veterans experience confusion between the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) offered by the Canadian Armed Forces and the Vocational Assistance program offered through VAC.

