

Veterans Review and Appeal Board

2019–20

Departmental Plan

The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of
National Defence

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and Associate Minister of National Defence, 2019

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Table of contents

Chair's message.....	1
Plans at a glance and operating context	3
Planned results: what we want to achieve this year and beyond	5
Core Responsibilities	5
Appeals	5
Description	5
Planning highlights	5
Internal Services.....	8
Description	8
Spending and human resources	11
Planned spending	11
Planned human resources.....	12
Estimates by vote.....	12
Future-Oriented Condensed Statement of Operations.....	12
Additional information	15
Corporate information	15
Organizational profile	15
Raison d'être, mandate and role: who we are and what we do.....	15
Reporting framework.....	16
Supporting information on the Program Inventory	16
Supplementary information tables	16
Federal tax expenditures	17
Organizational contact information	17
Appendix: definitions.....	19
Endnotes	23

Chair's message

I am pleased to present the 2019-20 Departmental Plan for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

The Board is the independent appeal tribunal for disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. Our mission is to provide Veterans, members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the RCMP, and their families, with timely, respectful hearings and fair, plain-language decisions.

This Departmental Plan outlines how we will support Veterans through the year ahead, what initiatives we will undertake to advance this work and how we will measure progress on our objectives.

The Board's priorities for 2019-20 are:

- To renew outreach with Veterans and stakeholders;
- To focus on quality decisions for Veterans; and
- To promote and support a diverse and inclusive workplace.

In 2019-20, we will pursue a number of initiatives that contribute to these priorities. For example, the Board will work more closely with stakeholders to help Veterans make the most of their appeal opportunities. Strengthening our relationships with those who advocate for Veterans will help us to better understand how we can support them when they come to the Board.

In addition, we will remain committed to excellence in service delivery so that Veterans wait less, have a good hearing experience and receive quality decisions. We will improve how we schedule cases, explore new opportunities for using My VAC Account to serve applicants, and enhance training and professional development for Board members and staff.

The Board will also be working towards improving diversity and encouraging inclusiveness in the workplace. By making these a priority, we will create a stronger and more effective workforce equipped to fully support Canada's diverse community of Veterans.

It is an honour and a privilege to help fulfill our collective obligation, as Canadians, to those who have served our country, and their loved ones. The priorities outlined within the Board's 2019-20 Departmental Plan will help us ensure that Veterans, CAF and RCMP members, and their families, are receiving the benefits they are entitled to.



Christopher J. McNeil
Chair, Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Plans at a glance and operating context

For 2019-20, the Board has identified the following priorities to achieve its Core Responsibility and ensure applicants receive timely, high quality hearings and decisions.

- **Renewed focus on outreach**

The Board will extend its outreach to inform and engage with Veterans' organizations and stakeholders about the appeal program. These audiences are valued partners, and their feedback is important to ensuring that applicants' expectations for fairness, transparency and quality are met.

- **Quality decisions**

Along with the hearing, the decision is an important step in the appeal process for an applicant. Decisions inform applicants of the outcome in their case by clearly explaining how the Board considered the evidence and testimony. Ongoing professional development, performance feedback and support for Members and staff will further the Board's goal for quality and consistency in decisions.

- **Diversity and inclusion in the workplace**

The Board will take concrete actions to promote the government's priority of strengthening diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Achieving a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace benefits employees and is integral in providing a fair and respectful appeal program for Veterans.

Operating Context

The Board's operating environment is directly influenced by the unpredictability of the nature and volume of applications. Cases can often be complex requiring additional effort due to the nature of some disabilities and the difficulty in making a service relationship to grant entitlement. Another operational reality is that the Board has no control over the time it takes for applicants to prepare their cases for hearings. As a result, Members and staff must adapt to fluctuations in workload and stay abreast of emerging trends in the causation of medical conditions, jurisprudence, and the military and policing context.

The Board relies on its Members and staff to provide Veterans and their families with a fair and timely appeal process. As a small tribunal, it faces unique challenges in workforce management and makes ongoing efforts to maintain knowledgeable and skilled Members and staff to deliver its program.

A significant factor affecting the Board’s capacity to conduct hearings is the availability of fully-trained Members. Board Members are Governor-in-Council (GIC) appointees selected from a pre-qualified pool of Canadians. As the membership is dynamic, the Board strives to maintain a balance of experienced and new Members for expertise and knowledge transfer. To achieve this, the Board works closely with the Minister to ensure timely appointments and reappointments of Members.

For more information on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board’s plans, priorities and planned results, see the “Planned results” section of this report.

Planned results: what we want to achieve this year and beyond

Core Responsibilities

Appeals

Description

Provide an independent review and appeal program for disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada; ensure Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police members, and their families, receive the benefits they are entitled to under law for service-related disabilities.

Planning highlights

To fulfill its Core Responsibility and deliver on results, the Board is guided by its strategic priorities:

- Providing Veterans with excellent service
- Maintaining a high-performing organization
- Being open and accountable about its work

The initiatives and activities that flow from these priorities directly contribute to the Board's desired results, namely that:

- Applicants receive high quality hearings and decisions; and
- Applicants receive timely decisions.

Priority #1 **Excellence in Service Delivery**

- The Board is committed to providing applicants across Canada with timely hearings. As a result of changes in its workload context, the Board will work with representative organizations to improve the current scheduling model.
- More and more Veterans are using My VAC Account, which is a secure web portal that allows Veterans to do business with Veterans Affairs online. The Board will explore opportunities to use My VAC Account to improve its communications with Veterans.
- Training for Board Members is a priority, and directly contributes to consistent decisions with clear reasons written in plain language. To support Members in making quality decisions for Veterans, the Board will continue to enhance the training and ongoing professional development program for Board Members.

Priority #2 High-Performing Organization

- The Board recognizes that a healthy and inclusive workplace where employees feel valued and are engaged is a key component of a high-performing organization. The Board will embark on developing and implementing a Healthy Workplace Strategy that supports employee health, engagement, diversity and promotes a harassment- and discrimination-free work environment. With these principles in mind, the Board will also take steps to ensure that decisions and hearings support principles of diversity and are free from societal bias.
- The Board will review its legal and corporate services to ensure they align with the general direction of the Government of Canada and are resourced with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for effective service delivery.

Priority #3 Transparency and Accountability

- Board Members must adhere to a professional Code of Conduct for guidance in all aspects of their work as an adjudicator. The Code also provides applicants and others with a clear explanation of these expectations of conduct. The Board will review, update and publish the code to ensure that Board Members are held to the highest standards of conduct.
- The Board will also review and communicate its complaint process so that applicants and others have a clear understanding on how to make a complaint about an alleged infraction of the Code of Conduct.
- It is important that applicants and stakeholders have access to information about the Board's work. The Board will continue to develop its website by posting informative materials of interest to stakeholders, applicants and their representatives.

Risks

There is a risk that the Board will not be able to meet the demands for timely hearings and decisions. To mitigate these risks, the Board is working with representatives to improve the scheduling process. The Board is also continuing to review its service delivery mechanisms to ensure efficient business processes that will result in timely decisions. Opportunities in using My VAC Account may also improve the timeliness of information, such as decisions and other communications, to applicants.

There is a risk that frequent changes in the membership may affect the Board's ability to sustain a workforce with the necessary experience and expertise. The Board is dealing with this risk by maintaining a pool of qualified candidates and communicating the need for members to the Minister.

Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

The Board will promote the government's priority of strengthening diversity and inclusion in the public service by considering gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) in its activities and processes. The "plus" highlights the fact that gender-based analysis goes beyond sex and gender. It

examines how sex and gender intersect with other identities such as: race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental or physical disabilities.

In addition to developing a healthy workplace strategy, the Board recently formed an Inclusion Committee and is taking steps to improve awareness around these subjects. The Board is participating in the Veterans Affairs Canada GBA+ network which has the goal of raising awareness and disseminating tools and best practices.

Planned results

Departmental Results	Departmental Result Indicators	Target	Date to achieve target	2015–16 Actual results	2016–17 Actual results	2017–18 Actual results
Applicants receive high quality hearings and decisions	Percentage of applicants who provide positive feedback about their hearing	≥95%	March 31, 2020	Not available ¹	Not available ¹	Not available ¹
	Percentage of Board decisions that meet quality standards	≥85%	March 31, 2020	Not available ¹	Not available ¹	Not available ¹
	Percentage of Board decisions overturned by the Federal Court	<2%	March 31, 2020	0.2%	0.2%	0.7%
Applicants receive timely decisions	Percentage of Review decisions issued within 16 weeks of the applicant/representative notifying the Board their case is ready to be heard	≥95%	March 31, 2020	96%	96%	95%
	Percentage of Appeal decisions issued within 16 weeks of the applicant/representative notifying the Board their case is ready to be heard	≥85%	March 31, 2020	Not available ¹	Not available ¹	Not available ¹

¹ This performance indicator was revised for fiscal year 2018-19 and prior year data is not available.

Budgetary financial resources (dollars)

2019–20 Main Estimates	2019–20 Planned spending	2020–21 Planned spending	2021–22 Planned spending
10,911,155	10,911,155	10,911,087	10,911,087

Human resources (full-time equivalents)

2019–20 Planned full-time equivalents	2020–21 Planned full-time equivalents	2021–22 Planned full-time equivalents
101	101	101

Financial, human resources and performance information for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's Program Inventory is available in the [GC InfoBase](#).ⁱ

Internal Services**Description**

Internal Services are those groups of related activities and resources that the federal government considers to be services in support of Programs and/or required to meet corporate obligations of an organization. Internal Services refers to the activities and resources of the 10 distinct services that support Program delivery in the organization, regardless of the Internal Services delivery model in a department. These services are:

- Management and Oversight Services
- Communications Services
- Legal Services
- Human Resources Management Services
- Financial Management Services
- Information Management Services
- Information Technology Services
- Real Property Management Services
- Materiel Management Services
- Acquisition Management Services

Veterans Affairs Canada provides some of these internal services to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This service relationship has been in place since the Board was created in 1995 and continues to capitalize on the efficiencies presented by the Portfolio Department providing internal services to a small Portfolio member.

The Board will continue to work within the MOU for Internal Services developed with Veterans Affairs Canada.

Budgetary financial resources (dollars)

2019–20 Main Estimates	2019–20 Planned spending	2020–21 Planned spending	2021–22 Planned spending
Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided at no cost to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.			

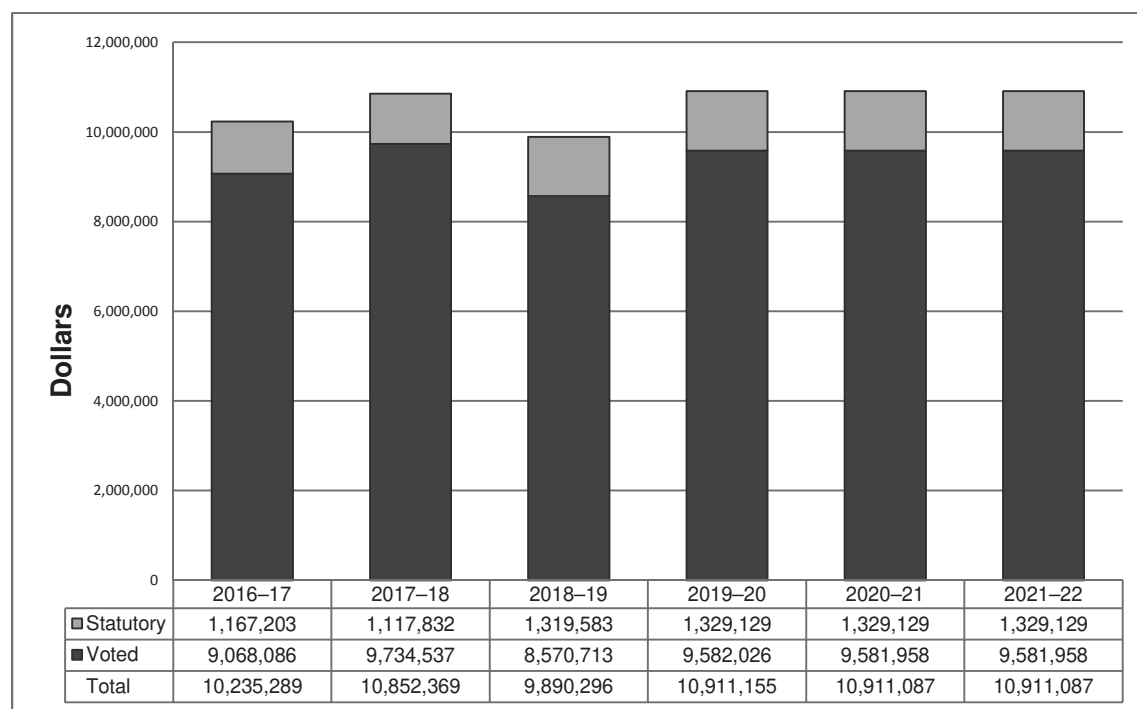
Human resources (full-time equivalents)

2019–20 Planned full-time equivalents	2020–21 Planned full-time equivalents	2021–22 Planned full-time equivalents
Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided at no cost to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.		

Spending and human resources

Planned spending

Departmental spending trend graph



Budgetary planning summary for Core Responsibilities and Internal Services (dollars)

Core Responsibilities and Internal Services	2016–17 Expenditures	2017–18 Expenditures	2018–19 Forecast spending	2019–20 Main Estimates	2019–20 Planned spending	2020–21 Planned spending	2021–22 Planned spending
Appeals	10,235,289	10,852,369	9,890,296	10,911,155	10,911,155	10,911,087	10,911,087
Internal Services	Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided at no cost to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.						
Total	10,235,289	10,852,369	9,890,296	10,911,155	10,911,155	10,911,087	10,911,087

Over the planning period 2019-20 to 2021-22, the Board's planned spending is relatively unchanged. With continued efficiencies in its operations, the Board will continue to deliver excellent service to applicants.

Planned human resources

Human resources planning summary for Core Responsibilities and Internal Services (full-time equivalents)

Core Responsibilities and Internal Services	2016–17 Actual full-time equivalents	2017–18 Actual full-time equivalents	2018–19 Forecast full-time equivalents	2019–20 Planned full-time equivalents	2020–21 Planned full-time equivalents	2021–22 Planned full-time equivalents
Appeals	92	86	101	101	101	101
Internal Services	Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided at no cost to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.					
Total	92	86	101	101	101	101

Planned resources in 2019-20 through 2021-22 are relatively unchanged.

Estimates by vote

Information on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's organizational appropriations is available in the [2019–20 Main Estimates](#).ⁱⁱ

Future-Oriented Condensed Statement of Operations

The Future-Oriented Condensed Statement of Operations provides a general overview of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's operations. The forecast of financial information on expenses and revenues is prepared on an accrual accounting basis to strengthen accountability and to improve transparency and financial management. The forecast and planned spending amounts presented in other sections of the Departmental Plan are prepared on an expenditure basis; as a result, amounts may differ.

A more detailed Future-Oriented Statement of Operations and associated notes, including a reconciliation of the net cost of operations to the requested authorities, are available on the [Veterans Review and Appeal Board's website](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

Future-Oriented Condensed Statement of Operations
for the year ending March 31, 2020 (dollars)

Financial information	2018–19 Forecast results	2019–20 Planned results	Difference (2019–20 Planned results minus 2018–19 Forecast results)
Total expenses	11,071,599	12,386,758	1,315,159
Total revenues	0	0	0
Net cost of operations before government funding and transfers	11,071,599	12,386,758	1,315,159

The planned spending for Veterans Review and Appeal Board as reported on a modified-cash basis for 2019-20 is \$10,911,155. This amount has been adjusted by estimated amounts for services provided without charge (i.e. accommodations, government payments to employee insurance plans, etc.), to arrive at a future-oriented total expense of \$12,386,758 for 2019-20.

Additional information

Corporate information

Organizational profile

Appropriate minister: The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, P.C., M.P.

Institutional head: Chris J. McNeil

Ministerial portfolio: Veterans Affairs

Enabling instruments: [Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act](#)^{iv}; [Veterans Review and Appeal Board Regulations](#)^v

Year of incorporation / commencement: 1995

Other: Applications for review and appeal can be made to the Board under the following legislation:

- [Pension Act](#)^{vi};
- [Veterans Well-being Act](#)^{vii};
- [War Veterans Allowance Act](#)^{viii};
- [Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act](#)^{ix}; and
- [Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act](#)^x.

The Board also adjudicates applications for compassionate awards made under section 34 of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act.

Raison d'être, mandate and role: who we are and what we do

“Raison d'être, mandate and role: who we are and what we do” is available on the [Veterans Review and Appeal Board's website](#)^{xi}.

Reporting framework

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board's Departmental Results Framework and Program Inventory of record for 2019–20 are shown below.

Departmental Results Framework	
Core Responsibility: Appeals	
Departmental Result: Applicants receive high quality hearings and decisions.	Indicator: Percentage of applicants who provide positive feedback about their hearing
	Indicator: Percentage of Board decisions that meet quality standards
	Indicator: Percentage of Board decisions overturned by the Federal Court
Departmental Result: Applicants receive timely decisions.	Indicator: Percentage of Review decisions issued within 16 weeks of the applicant/representative notifying the Board their case is ready to be heard
	Indicator: Percentage of Appeal decisions issued within 16 weeks of the applicant/representative notifying the Board their case is ready to be heard
Program Inventory	
Program: Review and Appeal	

Supporting information on the Program Inventory

Supporting information on planned expenditures, human resources, and results related to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's Program Inventory is available in the [GC InfoBase](#).^{xii}

Supplementary information tables

The following supplementary information tables are available on the

[Veterans Review and Appeal Board's website](#)^{xiii}.

- ▶ Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy
- ▶ Gender-based analysis plus

Federal tax expenditures

The tax system can be used to achieve public policy objectives through the application of special measures such as low tax rates, exemptions, deductions, deferrals and credits. The Department of Finance Canada publishes cost estimates and projections for these measures each year in the [Report on Federal Tax Expenditures](#).^{xiv} This report also provides detailed background information on tax expenditures, including descriptions, objectives, historical information and references to related federal spending programs, as well as evaluations, research papers and gender-based analysis. The tax measures presented in this report are the responsibility of the Minister of Finance.

Organizational contact information

Veterans Review and Appeal Board
161 Grafton Street
PO Box 9900
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island C1A 8V7
Canada
Website : <http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca>

Appendix: definitions

appropriation (crédit)

Any authority of Parliament to pay money out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

budgetary expenditures (dépenses budgétaires)

Operating and capital expenditures; transfer payments to other levels of government, organizations or individuals; and payments to Crown corporations.

Core Responsibility (responsabilité essentielle)

An enduring function or role performed by a department. The intentions of the department with respect to a Core Responsibility are reflected in one or more related Departmental Results that the department seeks to contribute to or influence.

Departmental Plan (plan ministériel)

A report on the plans and expected performance of an appropriated department over a three-year period. Departmental Plans are tabled in Parliament each spring.

Departmental Result (résultat ministériel)

Any change that the department seeks to influence. A Departmental Result is often outside departments' immediate control, but it should be influenced by Program-level outcomes.

Departmental Result Indicator (indicateur de résultat ministériel)

A factor or variable that provides a valid and reliable means to measure or describe progress on a Departmental Result.

Departmental Results Framework (cadre ministériel des résultats)

The department's Core Responsibilities, Departmental Results and Departmental Result Indicators.

Departmental Results Report (rapport sur les résultats ministériels)

A report on the actual accomplishments against the plans, priorities and expected results set out in the corresponding Departmental Plan.

evaluation (évaluation)

In the Government of Canada, the systematic and neutral collection and analysis of evidence to judge merit, worth or value. Evaluation informs decision making, improvements, innovation and accountability. Evaluations typically focus on programs, policies and priorities and examine questions related to relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Depending on user needs, however, evaluations can also examine other units, themes and issues, including alternatives to existing interventions. Evaluations generally employ social science research methods.

experimentation (expérimentation)

Activities that seek to explore, test and compare the effects and impacts of policies, interventions and approaches, to inform evidence-based decision-making, by learning what works and what does not.

full-time equivalent (équivalent temps plein)

A measure of the extent to which an employee represents a full person-year charge against a departmental budget. Full-time equivalents are calculated as a ratio of assigned hours of work to scheduled hours of work. Scheduled hours of work are set out in collective agreements.

gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) (analyse comparative entre les sexes plus [ACS+])

An analytical process used to help identify the potential impacts of policies, Programs and services on diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people. The “plus” acknowledges that GBA goes beyond sex and gender differences. We all have multiple identity factors that intersect to make us who we are; GBA+ considers many other identity factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

government-wide priorities (priorités pangouvernementales)

For the purpose of the 2019–20 Departmental Plan, government-wide priorities refers to those high-level themes outlining the government’s agenda in the 2015 Speech from the Throne, namely: Growth for the Middle Class; Open and Transparent Government; A Clean Environment and a Strong Economy; Diversity is Canada's Strength; and Security and Opportunity.

horizontal initiative (initiative horizontale)

An initiative where two or more departments are given funding to pursue a shared outcome, often linked to a government priority.

non-budgetary expenditures (dépenses non budgétaires)

Net outlays and receipts related to loans, investments and advances, which change the composition of the financial assets of the Government of Canada.

performance (rendement)

What an organization did with its resources to achieve its results, how well those results compare to what the organization intended to achieve, and how well lessons learned have been identified.

performance indicator (indicateur de rendement)

A qualitative or quantitative means of measuring an output or outcome, with the intention of gauging the performance of an organization, Program, policy or initiative respecting expected results.

Performance Information Profile (profil de l'information sur le rendement)

The document that identifies the performance information for each Program from the Program Inventory.

performance reporting (production de rapports sur le rendement)

The process of communicating evidence-based performance information. Performance reporting supports decision making, accountability and transparency.

plan (plan)

The articulation of strategic choices, which provides information on how an organization intends to achieve its priorities and associated results. Generally a plan will explain the logic behind the strategies chosen and tend to focus on actions that lead up to the expected result.

planned spending (dépenses prévues)

For Departmental Plans and Departmental Results Reports, planned spending refers to those amounts presented in the Main Estimates.

A department is expected to be aware of the authorities that it has sought and received. The determination of planned spending is a departmental responsibility, and departments must be able to defend the expenditure and accrual numbers presented in their Departmental Plans and Departmental Results Reports.

priority (priorité)

A plan or project that an organization has chosen to focus and report on during the planning period. Priorities represent the things that are most important or what must be done first to support the achievement of the desired Departmental Results.

Program (programme)

Individual or groups of services, activities or combinations thereof that are managed together within the department and focus on a specific set of outputs, outcomes or service levels.

Program Inventory (répertoire des programmes)

Identifies all of the department's programs and describes how resources are organized to contribute to the department's Core Responsibilities and Results.

result (résultat)

An external consequence attributed, in part, to an organization, policy, Program or initiative. Results are not within the control of a single organization, policy, Program or initiative; instead they are within the area of the organization's influence.

statutory expenditures (dépenses législatives)

Expenditures that Parliament has approved through legislation other than appropriation acts. The legislation sets out the purpose of the expenditures and the terms and conditions under which they may be made.

sunset program (programme temporisé)

A time-limited program that does not have an ongoing funding and policy authority. When the program is set to expire, a decision must be made whether to continue the program. In the case of a renewal, the decision specifies the scope, funding level and duration.

target (cible)

A measurable performance or success level that an organization, Program or initiative plans to achieve within a specified time period. Targets can be either quantitative or qualitative.

voted expenditures (dépenses votées)

Expenditures that Parliament approves annually through an Appropriation Act. The Vote wording becomes the governing conditions under which these expenditures may be made.

Endnotes

- i. GC InfoBase, <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#start>
- ii. 2018–19 Main Estimates, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/planned-government-spending/government-expenditure-plan-main-estimates.html>
- iii. Veterans Review and Appeal Board, <http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm>
- iv. Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/V-1.6/page-1.html>
- v. Veterans Review and Appeal Board Regulations, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-96-67/index.html>
- vi. Pension Act, <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-6/index.html>
- vii. Veterans Well-being Act, <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-16.8/index.html>
- viii. War Veterans Allowance Act, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/W-3/index.html>
- ix. Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/R-10.6/index.html>
- x. Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/R-11/index.html>
- xi. Veterans Review and Appeal Board, <http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm>
- xii. GC InfoBase, <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#start>
- xiii. Veterans Review and Appeal Board, <http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm>
- xiv. Report on Federal Tax Expenditures, <http://www.fin.gc.ca/purl/taxexp-eng.asp>