

**Veterans Affairs Canada's
Accessibility Progress Report
2023**



Veteran Affairs Canada's Accessibility Progress Report
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Note: As of the date of publication, this Accessibility Progress Report has been verified for accessibility. If you have any issues with this Report please contact the author.

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1. General

1.1 Process for receiving and dealing with accessibility feedback

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (the Act) and the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) require federally regulated entities, including VAC, to establish a process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback.

Feedback on accessibility can include your thoughts on:

- the implementation of VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan
- accessibility barriers at VAC
- how accessibility barriers at VAC can be prevented and/or removed
- accessibility best practices or success stories related to accessibility at VAC

An accessibility barrier is anything that does not allow persons with disabilities to be included and take part in all areas of life and society. Barriers prevent persons with disabilities from taking part in the same way that persons without disabilities can. The Act identifies five types of accessibility barriers:

- physical or architectural
- technological
- related to information and communications
- attitudinal
- systemic

How to provide your feedback

Feedback for Veterans Affairs Canada

Please send questions or feedback related to the Department's Accessibility Action Plan, Progress Report or accessibility at VAC in general, in one of the following ways:

Email: [Accessibility at VAC](#)

Phone: Toll-free: 1-866-522-2122
TDD/TTY: 1-833-921-0071

Mail: Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services Branch
Veterans Affairs Canada
PO Box 7700
Charlottetown PE C1A 8M9
Attention: Director General, Human Resources

Online: Through the [anonymous feedback form](#) on the VAC website.

Feedback for the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA)

Please send your questions or feedback related to the accessibility of BPA's service in one of the following ways:

Email: [Bureau of Pensions Advocates](#)

Phone: 1-877-228-2250

Mail: Bureau of Pensions Advocates Accessibility Feedback
P.O. Box 7700
Charlottetown, PE C1A 8M9

Online: Through the [anonymous feedback form](#) on the VAC website.

Please note that all feedback will be acknowledged in the same manner it was received (i.e., an email response to an email message), unless it was provided anonymously. Your feedback will be used to improve accessibility at VAC. We may address some feedback right away, or use it to develop future accessibility plans. We will include your feedback and how we used it in our progress reports.

Alternate formats

Note that you can use the contact information above to request the following documents in alternate formats:

- VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan
- VAC’s description of its accessibility-related feedback process
- annual progress reports on the implementation of VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan and how feedback is being taken into consideration.

Alternate formats include:

- print
- large print (increased font size and clarity)
- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers)
- audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud)
- electronic (an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities)

1.2 Introduction message

On 11 July 2019, the Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81) came into force. The Act seeks to make Canada barrier-free by 1 January 2040.

The Act also requires federally regulated entities to develop an Accessibility Action Plan to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers under federal jurisdiction in the following priority areas:

- employment
- the built environment (buildings and public spaces)
- information and communication technologies
- communication, other than information and communication technologies
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities
- the design and delivery of programs and services
- transportation

[VAC’s 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan¹](#) (the Plan) identifies a number of actions to take to prevent and remove accessibility barriers in these priority areas. The Plan also identifies actions that will support the Department in advancing its accessibility culture shift.

VAC is proud to release this 2023 Accessibility Progress Report, which highlights achievements since the Plan was implemented.

¹ VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan includes the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, as well as the Office of the Veterans Ombud.

This 2023 Accessibility Progress Report does not cover the entire 2023 calendar year, given the time that was required to have the Report approved and published. With that said, any progress made in 2023 that is not addressed in this Report will be covered in the 2024 Progress Report. The Department also notes that at the time this report was ready for publication, VAC's analysis of the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) results was still underway. However, the Department expects that actions and measures developed in response to these results, as well as measures for the Department's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, will support future progress reporting and our journey to inclusion and accessibility confidence.

As the Department moves forward on its journey to become barrier-free, we will embrace the opportunity to report back annually on progress, and to strengthen our performance measurement capacity. Through updated accessibility action plans and progress reports, the Department will hold itself accountable, and will also respond to the Clerk of the Privy Council's [Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion](#).

1.3 Progress at a glance

Upon its publication in December 2022, VAC's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan identified 37 actions the Department would take to remove and prevent accessibility barriers.

In 2023, after initial publication of the Plan, it was updated to include 2 new actions and 1 new barrier:

- **Action:** To support VAC's commitment to achieving a projected workforce representation target for persons with disabilities in non-EX positions of 8.70% by 2025 – and in support of the Government of Canada's goal to hire 5,000 employees with disabilities in the public service by 2025 – it is projected that VAC will need to hire 100 net new persons with disabilities in this same timeframe.
- **Barrier:** Acknowledging that while workspaces are fit up to include standard ergonomic equipment (i.e., desks, chairs, monitor arms, along with ergonomic mice and keyboards) by default or upon request, staff may not have the required information to optimally set up their equipment to their individual needs.
- **Action:** Update VAC's ergonomic guidelines

Additionally, one action that was initially grouped under an employment barrier has been separated to be its own action. (This action is: finalize the business case including resource requirements, roles, processes, tools and partnerships for a disability management unit, duty to accommodate, long term disability, workers compensation and return to work, using a case management approach).

VAC is well on track to meeting the commitments set out in the Department's 2022-25 Accessibility Action Plan.

This Progress Report now identifies 40 actions in total. Of these 40 actions:

- 15 actions were/will be completed by December 2023:
 - 6 were completed by the original date of June 2023; and
 - 9 were/will be completed by the original date of December 2023.
- 23 actions are in progress:
 - 10 experienced some delays and had their completion dates amended. In some cases, this may be because the actions are dependent on other organizations (i.e., Shared Services Canada), current operational priorities, or because more work was deemed necessary than initially anticipated. For ease of reference, changes in completion dates are identified in section 2; and
 - 13 are on track to be completed by their original dates of completion.
- 2 actions have not yet started:
 - Both have maintained their original completion dates.

1.4 Message from the Deputy Minister and VAC's Accessibility Champion

The *Accessible Canada Act* passed in 2019 with the goal of creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040, and VAC is more committed than ever to furthering this goal. Departmental accessibility action plans and progress reports are helping us take action to identify and remove barriers, while preventing new ones.

Our work to improve accessibility must also be considered in the context of the broader objective of enhancing a culture of inclusion: we need to continue making progress to ensure all VAC employees feel a sense of belonging in a workplace where diversity is embraced.

As public servants, accessibility must be central in the work that we do, the services we deliver, and in our culture. At VAC, becoming more accessibility confident as a Department is an important goal: we want our entire organization to know what accessibility means, and why it matters.

As the Department's Deputy Minister, and as VAC's first-ever Champion of Accessibility, we see many opportunities for Departmental leadership to promote accessibility awareness, and to bring leadership to the important work of removing and preventing barriers for the benefit of employees and Veterans alike.

Like our 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, this 2023 Progress Report benefited from consultation with VAC's Accessibility Network. We are proud to uphold the ["Nothing Without Us"](#) principle, ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are heard and reflected in matters that impact them.

We look forward to continuing on this journey to implement the *Accessible Canada Act* through updated accessibility action plans, progress monitoring, and the continued culture shift that will ensure VAC is a workplace where all can participate fully and equally.

Sincerely,

Paul Ledwell
Deputy Minister

Pierre Tessier
Champion of Accessibility

1.5 Accessibility statement (wording revised)

VAC commits to continuous learning, and to taking steps now and into the future to foster a respectful, equitable and accessible environment that removes accessibility barriers and supports inclusion for all.

2. Areas described under section 5 of the Act

2.1 Employment

Desired outcomes:

- Job seekers with disabilities see VAC as a workplace of choice.
- Job seekers and public servants with disabilities have access to employment opportunities at VAC and can contribute to their full potential.

2.1.1 Employment barrier #1

- Persons with disabilities are under-represented in VAC's hiring, acting appointments, and promotions, and are over-represented in departures. This may be due to one or more of the following factors:
 - persons with disabilities having difficulties with, and higher drop-off rates in, selection processes (as compared to persons without disabilities)
 - lack of skill development opportunities for persons with disabilities, including language training, to support career growth and development
 - persons with disabilities not self-identifying
 - VAC not being perceived as an accessible and inclusive workplace

Action # 1 for employment barrier #1 (new action item)

- VAC is committed to building a diverse workforce that is representative of the Canadian population. As of January 2023, workforce representation has been falling short of workforce availability for persons with disabilities among employees. VAC has, however,

exceeded workforce availability for executives. The Department's representation targets are a baseline that has been set based on projections for workforce availability in 2026.

As of January 2023:

- Workforce availability for executives with disabilities at VAC was 5.69%. VAC's executive workforce representation was 6.17%, which exceeds workforce availability.
- For those who are not executives, the workforce availability for persons with disabilities in 2023 was 9.44%. VAC's workforce falls short, including 7.06% persons with disabilities. The goal is to achieve the projected workforce representation target of 8.70% by 2025.
 - **Completed by:** June 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services (CFOCS) Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

These hiring targets, and progress toward achieving them, represent the Department's commitment to helping the Government of Canada realize its goal to hire 5,000 employees with disabilities in the public service by 2025. It is projected that the Department will need to hire 100 net new persons with disabilities by 2025 to help the Government of Canada meet this goal.

Action #2 for employment barrier #1

- Develop VAC-specific tools for more accessible and inclusive hiring with the goal of closing the representation gaps for people with disabilities:
 - Plan a "just in time" unconscious bias tool that VAC's assessment board members and hiring managers can review prior to making staffing decisions.
 - Implement an "Attestation of Impartiality and Diversity Form", where selection board members can document that they belong to equity seeking communities.
 - Create a repository including the names of qualified equity-seeking community members who are interested in participating in assessment boards.
 - Develop an "Articulation of Selection Decision Form" highlighting key employment equity considerations in the selection of candidates.
 - Identify three Accommodation Assessment Ambassadors among staffing advisors to support hiring managers in offering timely and appropriate accommodation measures during staffing processes.
- **Completed by:** June 2023
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch

- **Status:** Completed

The Department's "Checking in on Unconscious Bias" guide can now be used by hiring managers and assessment board members to recognize and address bias at the start of the appointment process, or when making an appointment.

An Attestation of Impartiality, Diversity & Inclusion form is now mandatory for all managers and assessment board members for appointment processes at VAC. The form requires selection board members to attest to candidate assessment in a manner that is mindful of personal bias and the diversity of candidates. The form also allows selection board members to indicate if they belong to equity-seeking communities, or if they are a Veteran, leading to more diverse assessment boards and fair staffing decisions.

VAC has identified three Accommodation Assessment Ambassadors (Ambassadors) to support hiring managers in providing timely and appropriate accommodation measures during appointment processes. Ambassadors participate in activities and discussions to keep up to date on recommendations relating to accessible assessment and accessibility in general. Ambassadors are part of an interdepartmental network connecting VAC with subject matter experts from the Public Service Commission's (PSC) Personnel Psychology Centre (PPC), and Ambassadors from other Departments.

The Department created a repository of qualified employees and managers with diverse identify factors who are interested in participating on assessment boards during advertised and non-advertised selection processes. The platform also contains information on board members' responsibilities, including a listing of training courses on unconscious bias.

The Articulation of Selection Decision form was launched to help guide managers with describing and documenting their selection decision when appointing a candidate. The form ensures staffing is as unbiased as possible by requiring a fact-based explanation of decisions.

In addition, a reference document to guide managers regarding staffing options is under development. This resource will highlight staffing options that support employment equity, including persons with disabilities, and will prompt managers to recognize staffing opportunities.

Action #3 for employment barrier #1

- Tailor initiatives to support recruitment and career development of persons with disabilities:

- Create a fully qualified EX minus 1 pool tailored to recruit members of certain equity-seeking communities, including persons with disabilities.
- Coordinate sessions with the VAC Managers Network to promote diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including the demystifying of common myths associated with the recruitment of persons with disabilities.
- **Completed by:** June 2023
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
- **Status:** Completed and ongoing

On 10 January 2023, VAC created a hiring pool of 79 fully qualified EX minus 1 employees from equity-seeking communities, including persons with disabilities. All managers are to consider and use this pool when staffing vacancies, which is also available to other Departments. As of 18 July 2023, 2 persons with disabilities have been appointed to positions at VAC through this hiring pool.

Coordination of learning sessions with VAC Managers' Network is completed.

- The Recruitment Strategies for Enhancing Diversity learning session was presented to the VAC Managers' Network in January 2023. The session, which had 150 participants, took place to promote diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including through revealing common myths associated with the recruitment of persons with disabilities.
- In April 2023 VAC's Diversity and Inclusion Centre of Excellence led a panel discussion on neurodiversity in partnership with Statistics Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, with 220 participants.
- The Inclusive Leadership learning session was presented to the VAC Manager's Network in July 2023, with 105 participants.

Planning is underway for future learning sessions at VAC, including on the Public Service Commission of Canada's new tool to mitigate biases and barriers. The tool has been shared by VAC Human Resources Advisors and with managers of the Department.

Action #4 for employment barrier #1

- Promote VAC as an inclusive workplace for employees with disabilities.
- Launch a learning series on "How to Apply on a Process" for all employees, including a session tailored to persons with disabilities.
- Undertake a review of onboarding materials to ensure they include links to accessibility-related supports, and how to obtain them.
- **Completed by:** ~~June 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2023

(The timeline was extended due to the current operational priorities of VAC's Human Resources Division. While work on this action is underway, the status remains in progress until the updated completion date of December 2023.)

- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
- **Status:** In progress

In June 2023, VAC launched the Department's "How to Apply on a Process" learning series and guide for employees, with learning sessions tailored to persons with disabilities. Participants in the session were given opportunity to raise questions related to staffing, accommodation measures, and accessibility, in a safe space. These sessions were provided on 12 July 2023, with 46 participants attending the English session and 9 participants attending the French session.

The review of the Department's onboarding materials is complete. Onboarding guides and checklists have been updated with more inclusive language, and to ensure accessibility and accommodations are described. All new hires at VAC receive a welcome letter as part of their onboarding experience. The letter has been reviewed to ensure that positive and inclusive language is used. Specific content was added in relation to accommodations and accessibility, including promotion of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

Furthermore, in May 2023, VAC named its first-ever Departmental Accessibility Champion. Champions play a key role in supporting VAC and Government of Canada initiatives and priorities, as well as advocating for employee and manager communities. The appointment of the Accessibility Champion, together with new governance of Diversity and Inclusion at VAC, will provide leadership, support and guidance to build awareness, and advance priorities for important issues impacting persons with disabilities and accessibility within the Department.

- Launch a self-identification campaign.
- Undertake a review of language used in recruitment communications to ensure it is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive.

- **Completed by:** ~~June 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2025
(This timeline was extended due to the current operational priorities of VAC's Human Resources Division. While work on this action is underway, the status remains in progress until the updated completion date of December 2025.)
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
- **Status:** In progress

The Department's self-identification campaign is pending further direction from the Government of Canada.

VAC's review of language used in recruitment communications is in progress. This is a multi-year project that requires a review of hundreds of templates. This also entails work with hiring

managers and assessment board teams to update correspondence they use in their communications with candidates.

2.1.2 Employment barrier #2

- The process for employees to obtain accommodations or tools and resources needed at work is complex. This also impacts managers, who do not feel equipped to recruit, develop and support persons with disabilities.

Action #1 for employment barrier #2 (action revised)

- Finalize the business case (including resource requirements, roles, processes, tools, and partnerships) for a Disability Management Unit at VAC. The Unit will introduce an improved and centrally coordinated approach to employee disability management, duty to accommodate, long term disability, workers compensation and return to work, using a case management approach. Through the Disability Management Unit, the Department will also be able to create a process to ask employees about their accommodation and equipment needs.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is in the final stages of a business case that includes resource requirements, roles, processes, tools, and partnerships for a Disability Management Unit. This unit will introduce an improved and centrally coordinated approach to employee disability management, duty to accommodate, long term disability, workers compensation and return to work, using a case management approach. Furthermore, a process to ask employees about their accommodation and equipment needs is currently under development. For example, the Department held a digitization brainstorm and put forward an option to digitize the Duty to Accommodate request process.

Action #2 for employment barrier #2

- Create a Duty to Accommodate checklist for managers which includes links to resources, policies, practices and guidelines. Guidelines should include expected timeframes.
- Create FAQs to demystify the Duty to Accommodate process for employees and managers, offering tips on what is necessary for efficient approvals of DTA requests, and how/where to seek support to prepare for the conversations.
- Develop a learning and communications plan, including mandatory Duty to Accommodate training such as the Canada School of Public Service's course on "Disability Management and Workplace Wellness", workshops/information sessions and

email reminders tailored to specific audiences such as the management community, human resources enablers and/or all-staff. (Action wording revised)

- Implement the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport and reduce accommodations-related document requests to candidates when documents may not be required (or requirements can be minimized).
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024
(The timeline for this action was extended due to the current operational priorities of VAC's Human Resources Division. While work on this action is well advanced, the status remains in progress until the updated completion date of June 2024.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC's Disability Management Unit will allow the Department to explore in more depth how best to implement the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport. In the meantime, VAC has shared the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport on its intranet site. The Passport is a tool for public service employees to document the barriers they may face at work and the adaptive tools and support measures they need to succeed.

Information about the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport is also part of the Department's Accessibility Confidence at VAC: A Playbook, which is available to all VAC staff on the Department's intranet site.

In fall 2022, accommodations-related guidance and a checklist were developed and communicated to remind managers of requirements and best practices with respect to the Duty to Accommodate in the hybrid workplace. After the launch of the Disability Management Unit, this checklist will be repackaged and recommunicated.

In fall 2022, common Duty to Accommodate questions and answers related to the hybrid workplace were shared with all staff on the Department's intranet site. The questions and answers will be expanded upon to support broader communication and awareness on Duty to Accommodate to all employees/managers.

In fall 2022 and winter 2023, training on the Duty to Accommodate was provided to all of VAC's [excluded management](#) (not represented by a bargaining agent because of the nature of the duties of the position). The training focused on the Duty to Accommodate and its application under the Hybrid Workplace. Once set up, the Department's Disability Management Unit will work closely with Corporate HR to determine a Duty to Accommodate training framework for VAC.

An all-staff information session on “Healthy Interactions in a Hybrid Workplace” was facilitated by a mental health practitioner on 25 January 2023. The session provided managers and employees with communication tools to raise concerns in a safe and healthy way, including accommodation requirements.

The updated VAC National Guidelines on Ergonomics were also released on 15 March 2023.

In fall 2023, the Department initiated a new mandatory training requirement on the Duty to Accommodate for all VAC managers. Managers must now complete the Canada School of Public Service course “Disability Management and Workplace Wellness”, with a target date for managers to complete this training by 31 December 2024.

Progress and the impact of these actions will be measured based on the percentage of persons with disabilities, and other employees, who report satisfaction with their accommodation measures in the Public Service Employee Survey.

2.1.3 Employment barrier #3

- Managers may not consider operational requirements and related accessibility barriers when hiring persons with disabilities.

Action #1 for employment barrier #3

- Equip managers to consider operational requirements and related accessibility barriers when hiring persons with disabilities through education and awareness, including through the following (action wording revised):
 - In the 2023-24 fiscal year, VAC will develop and launch Assessment Board Education Sessions. The sessions will increase accessibility awareness and skills of assessment board members and hiring managers. The Sessions will help build knowledge of the requirement to establish a Statement of Merit Criteria and of the associated assessment tools that are barrier- and bias-free, and accessible by design. This training will help ensure that managers are thinking about accommodations for persons with disabilities throughout the hiring process, while supporting candidates to showcase their skills, competencies, and abilities in an obstacle- and barrier-free environment.
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024
(The timeline was extended to allow for meaningful consultation with various stakeholders in the development of the content. While work on this action is underway, the status remains in progress until the updated completed by date of June 2024.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

The Assessment Board Education Sessions are currently under development after having received sample material from other federal government departments. The material will be finalized in the coming months and sessions for assessment board members will begin being offered before the end of fiscal year 2023/24. Additionally, in January 2023, the VAC Managers Network delivered a session on “Recruitment Strategies for Enhancing Diversity”, discussing: hiring tools and initiatives; the use of positive language; dispelling myths of hiring persons with disabilities; accommodation ambassadors in HR; and awareness of bias in staffing and recruitment. This session, which was attended by 150 VAC staff, was recorded and can be viewed by managers who were not able to attend the session.

Education and awareness are part of the sub-delegation process at VAC. Effective April 1, 2022, all sub-delegated managers at VAC are required to have completed the CSPS course: Inclusive Hiring Practices for a Diverse Workforce (COR120). While this milestone has been achieved, this training will continue to be a required part of the sub-delegation process at VAC for all new managers in pursuit of their staffing sub-delegated authorities. Also, the broader implementation and promotion of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport will include education and guidance on its effective utilization in staffing processes, onboarding and ongoing retention of employees.

- Provide hiring managers with a list of software and the accessibility status of each. Identify accessible alternatives(action wording revised).
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised date:** June 2024
(This work involves VAC’s participation in a working group with members of Shared Services Canada’s (SSC) Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program to develop a standardized checklist that VAC can then use to perform audits on existing software.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is currently participating in a working group with members of Shared Services Canada’s (SSC) Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program to develop a standardized checklist that VAC can use to perform audits on our existing software. The list of top eight software (Foxit PDF Editor, Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Microsoft Office 365, Adobe Reader DC, Zoom, Fortinet, MyInfo+) will be kept up to date for ease of use.

2.2 The built environment

Desired outcome:

- VAC’s built environments are barrier-free.

2.2.1 The built environment barrier #1

- Workspaces are not always set up with specialized accessibility-related equipment and/or assistive technology in a timely manner. (Action wording revised)

Action #1 for the built environment barrier #1

- Introduce a new process for purchasing/acquiring specialized accessibility-related equipment and/or assistive technology, in which managers will order two units of the required equipment – one for the employee, and an additional for backup. (Action wording revised)
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

This proactive approach will ensure seamless continuity in case of any unforeseen equipment issues. As trends are identified from the equipment requested, VAC will assess the feasibility of establishing an inventory for this equipment(contingent upon the technical aspects of the technology). The Material Management Team has begun compiling a list of all specialized-related equipment and/or assistive technology requested by employees throughout the last year. When the team receives a request for equipment, they order two of the items: one for distribution to the employee in need and another to be stored in inventory. Material Management has committed to formalizing this process for purchasing accessible equipment by December 2023.

2.2.2 The built environment barrier #2 (new barrier)

While workspaces are fit to include standard ergonomic equipment (i.e., desks, chairs, monitor arms, along with ergonomic mice and keyboards) by default or upon request, staff may not have the ergonomic information needed to set up their equipment to best suit individual needs.

Action #1 for built environment barrier #2 (new action item)

- Update VAC's Ergonomic Guidelines.
 - **Completed by:** June 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

On 15 March 2023, the Department published updated VAC Ergonomic Guidelines. These guidelines help staff familiarize themselves with the optimal setup for their individual needs.

2.2.3 The built environment barrier #3

- Persons with disabilities who visit and/or work in VAC offices (whether Departmental employees, clients, or other members of the public) have identified physical and/or architectural barriers including situations of, for example, uncomfortable seating, poor ramps, inaccessible signage and inaccessible parking.

Action #1 for the built environment barrier #3

- Develop increased awareness about opportunities to provide feedback from persons with disabilities (internal and external) on accessibility issues related to the built environment and develop a process to collect feedback, then track and resolve issues in a timely manner. (Action wording revised)
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, Service Delivery (SD) Branch, and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)
 - **Status:** Completed

VAC has launched an awareness campaign to promote the Department's accessibility-related feedback mechanisms (i.e., phone, mail, email, anonymous feedback form) to persons with disabilities internal and external to the Department.

The awareness campaign is designed to increase awareness of the Department's commitment to removing accessibility barriers in VAC offices, and promote feedback opportunities (i.e., through promotional posters and/or electronic notices).

2.2.4 The built environment barrier #4

- Safety equipment (i.e., plexiglass in area offices) installed to protect employees may have an aggravating effect on some persons with disabilities.

Action #1 for the built environment barrier #4

- Engage third-party specialists to assess the impact of employee safety equipment on persons with disabilities and identify options for more accessible equipment.
 - **Completed by:** December 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** Not yet started

2.2.5 The built environment barrier #5

- VAC's emergency and business continuity procedures do not fully take into account accessibility (i.e., evacuation plans do not specifically address how to evacuate persons with disabilities).

Action #1 for the built environment barrier 5

- Review and evaluate VAC's emergency and business continuity planning procedures to make them more accessible, while not compromising safety and complying with physical security directives.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

These procedures have been reviewed and evaluated for accessibility. For example, if an employee cannot use the stairs and requires assistance during an emergency, it has been confirmed that the employee will be escorted to a specific location in the building by two monitors. One monitor will report the location of the employee requiring assistance to the Floor Warden, and another will remain with the employee until the arrival of first responders (i.e., firefighters), who will evacuate the employee requiring assistance.

2.2.6 The built environment barrier #6

- There are known accessibility barriers at VAC's numerous commemorative sites in Canada and overseas. However, due to their historical value, modifications to these sites' structures and features must be carefully considered in order to balance protection and preservation concerns.

Action #1 for the built environment barrier #6

- Engage appropriate expert(s) to assess accessibility requirements at VAC's commemorative sites, beginning with a comprehensive accessibility assessment by experts in cultural resource management.
 - **Completed by:** ~~June 2025~~ **Revised:** December 2025
(The timeline for this was extended due to procurement of overseas services and consultations required from VAC's Commemoration Division. While work on this action is well advanced, the status remains in progress until the updated completion date of December 2025.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** Commemoration and Public Affairs (CPA) Branch, CFOCS Branch, and experts (i.e., PSPC, contractor)

- **Status:** In progress

Commemorative Sites outside Canada (overseas):

VAC's Commemoration Division is currently contracting out to begin assessments of VAC's overseas sites regarding any accessibility barriers that may currently exist or have been identified previously.

Commemoration Sites within Canada (domestic):

VAC has received its accessibility assessment review and recommendations from PSPC for Veterans Cemetery, located in Esquimalt, BC. A phased approach will be taken to complete the upgrades. Upgrades to the public washrooms were completed in the fall/winter of 2022.

The accessibility assessment at Fort Massey located in Halifax, NS, is planned for 2023-2024 to identify any potential barriers requiring upgrades.

2.3 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Desired outcome:

- Veterans Affairs Canada's information and communications technology is usable by all, regardless of ability.

2.3.1 ICT barrier #1

- VAC's Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN), an integrated system that supports VAC employees in delivering departmental benefits and services, is not accessible. This legacy client data repository and processing system was built on older technology and cannot be brought to an accessible state.
- CSDN's current replacement is GCcase. Although it is more accessible than CSDN, GCcase is not fully accessible. GCcase is a version of Microsoft Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM) hosted by PSPC. A newer version of Dynamics CRM will be more accessible.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #1

- Develop a plan (i.e., the IT Modernization Plan) to further modernize systems (i.e., CSDN and GCcase), including to make them more accessible.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch

- **Status:** Completed

VAC has developed a plan to modernize its systems and make them more accessible. This plan includes two distinct activities:

1. Implementation of a new system
2. Migration of functionality (process of moving from one system to another) to the new system

Action #2 for ICT barrier #1

- Implement a more accessible version of Microsoft Dynamics CRM at VAC and migrate current systems to the new platforms.
 - **Completed by:** December 2024 (implementation only)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

Implementation:

Implementation of the new Microsoft Dynamics consists of these incremental, or step-by-step upgrades:

1. From our current version of GCcase to GCcase 9.1 (completed in 2023)
2. To Microsoft Dynamics CRM (work to begin in 2024)
3. To the cloud version of this platform (work to begin in 2024)

Indicator: Number of incremental upgrades performed and remaining.

Data Source: IT Modernization project sources

Migration: Migration of functionality from the old client systems to the new platform is underway.

- We've implemented some internal client system functionality in GCcase 9.1.
- Migration of remaining internal client system functionality could begin in 2025.
- Migration work is time-consuming. It will extend into the next planning and reporting cycle.

Indicator: Number of VAC programs migrated to the modernized system:

- Not yet started
- In progress
- Complete

Data source: Workflow and task management tool and IT Modernization project sources

2.3.2 ICT barrier #2

- Some web-based applications are not fully accessible. For instance, My VAC Account is not fully compliant with the European Standard (EN 301 549). EN 301 549 is the European Union (EU) standard that pertains to digital accessibility that TBS is adopting for ICT. This standard mandates all ICT in the public sector to be fully accessible. My VAC Account is a public-facing client portal that provides a simple and secure way to do business online with VAC. It currently has over 140,000 users.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #2

- Bring My VAC Account into compliance with the European Standard (EN 301 549).
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC released a user-friendly, accessible re-design of My VAC Account in 2023 that meets Government of Canada web standards. In 2022, VAC completed a full assessment against the standard (WCAG 2.1 Level AA as referenced in EN 301 549). Results revealed some critical, serious, moderate, and minor non-conformance issues.

VAC is addressing these issues in order of severity, starting with those that are critical, and has addressed approximately 90% of critical and serious issues. This means that people who rely on assistive technologies, and who previously may have been prevented from accessing fundamental features or content, can now access such features and content.

It is also to be noted that work on every new feature or update begins with an accessible design and usability testing with Veterans.

The My VAC Account team will continue (indefinitely) to include accessibility and usability in design and development cycles to maintain conformance with the standard (WCAG 2.1 Level AA as referenced in EN 301 549) and with any future version of this standard.

Action #2 for ICT barrier #2

- Bring actively maintained web applications into compliance with the European Standard (EN 301 549) and apply the standard to any new features added to these applications.
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

Actively-maintained web applications are those that we enhance or improve often. We add new features to these, or improve the navigation in them. (By contrast, other web apps are stable and don't need new features.)

VAC has conducted accessibility assessments of some actively-maintained web applications. We are continuing these assessments and making sure teams have the tools and training they need to do this work.

VAC is building accessibility into all new web apps from the start.

Action #3 for ICT barrier #2

- Bring 25% of other web applications – i.e., applications that are stable and not being updated with new functionality at this time – into compliance with the EN 301 549 standard. These applications are unlikely to have new features and may be in scope for migration to Microsoft Dynamics CRM.
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** Not yet started

2.3.3 ICT barrier #3

- Client-facing forms, letters, and scanned documents are not fully accessible. Client-facing forms and letters converted to Portable Document Format (PDF) in VAC's systems can have accessibility issues, especially with screen readers.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #3

- Determine the nature and scope of accessibility barriers within forms, letters, and scanned documents (i.e., PDFs). Determine a method to bring each into compliance with the European Standard (EN 301 549).
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

VAC's assessment of existing letters and forms found that the only thing preventing these documents from being fully accessible is related to how fonts are embedded. VAC is working to correct this by changing the fonts. We cannot guarantee compliance to standard for PDFs. This is not limited to VAC.

Action #2 for ICT barrier #3

- Perform accessibility assessments on forms as they are being created or updated and identify solutions.
 - **Completed by:** December 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

The Department follows good accessibility practices in the design phase of forms development. VAC also made progress assessing forms against the standard and has identified some development issues preventing us from meeting the standard (WCAG, section 9 of the EN 301 549). VAC continues to work on solutions for these.

VAC has assessed and removed barriers from its client letter-generating tool. This is the tool that VAC employees use to build letters that will be sent to clients. The tool now conforms to WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

VAC will continue to include accessibility in design and development cycles to maintain compliance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA and with any future version of this standard.

Action #3 for ICT barrier #3

- Bring 25% of forms and letters into compliance with the European Standard (EN 301 549).
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAS has resolved accessibility issues in one of the client letter templates, and has started bringing forms into compliance in order of highest to lowest usage.

Once an item is brought into compliance, teams will continue (indefinitely) to include accessibility in design and development cycles to maintain compliance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA and with any future version of this standard.

2.3.4 ICT barrier #4

- Data analytics dashboards and reports are not fully accessible.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #4

- Identify and remove accessibility barriers in 50% of data analytics dashboards and reports.
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC has identified affected analytics dashboards. Dashboards are visualizations that provide high level data at a glance and allow users to select different key data to view detailed reports. Because dashboards are visualizations, they are not accessible to everyone.

Going forward, VAC will release each dashboard with alternative accessible versions of key reports, and will provide accessible versions of other dashboard reports on request.

VAC is implementing a new reporting portal that will support publishing dashboards and the accessible versions of the reports in the same area. Navigation of the new portal is accessible.

2.3.5 ICT barrier #5

- Not all public-facing mobile applications are fully accessible (i.e., Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Coach Canada and Veterans Matter mobile applications).

Action #1 for ICT barrier #5

- Perform accessibility assessments and upgrade public-facing mobile applications.
 - **Completed by:** December 2025
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC has upgraded PTSD Coach Canada and has conducted an accessibility assessment of the new version.

Work on fixing accessibility non-compliance issues is expected to continue into the next reporting year.

The Veterans Matter mobile application is no longer available for download.

2.3.6 ICT barrier #6

- Some of VAC's internal legacy desktop software (i.e., software provided by third-party vendors) is not fully accessible.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #6

- Conduct accessibility audits to identify fixes on internal desktop software and take action as appropriate (upgrade or replace).
 - **Completed by:** December 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is currently working with Shared Services Canada's (SSC) Accessibility Working Group to come up with audit procedures and an accessibility scorecard. The procedures and scorecard will guide how VAC does reviews and audits for internal software. This will determine whether or not third-party software meets the identified criteria for accessibility. Once the process is completed, VAC will have scorecards and an explanation on what the outcome is in an Excel spreadsheet for all VAC employees to view.

2.3.7 ICT barrier #7

- Certain accessibility features of VAC's operating system and mobile devices are not enabled due to concerns around compatibility and security.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #7

- Evaluate additional accessibility features of VAC's operations system and mobile devices that can be enabled.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, Shared Services Canada (SSC)
 - **Status:** Completed

All accessibility features of VAC's operating system are enabled and available for employees to use. There are some accessibility features that are disabled by default on mobile devices due to security concerns. The disabled accessibility features on mobile devices can be enabled through a request to SSC's AAAC (Accessibility, Accommodations & Adaptive Computer Technology) Team.

2.3.8 ICT barrier #8

- The current procurement process for new software and hardware does not include a standard accessibility evaluation.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #8

- Develop a standard accessibility evaluation and incorporate this evaluation into the procurement process for new software and hardware.
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2024
(This work is being undertaken by VAC in collaboration with Shared Services Canada's AACT group. VAC will continue working with this group to come up with audit procedures and a scorecard. These procedures and scorecard will support VAC in the review and audit of the accessibility of desktop software and hardware.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SSC
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is currently reviewing its procurement process and how best to evaluate new software and hardware requests. VAC is working with Shared Services Canada's (SSC) Accessibility Working Group to come up with audit procedures and a scorecard. These procedures and scorecards will support VAC in the review and audit of the accessibility of desktop software and hardware.

VAC will be tracking each software accessibility audit and keeping records regarding details of the audit and making it available to employees

- **Target:** 90% of software is accessible; remaining 10% has an alternative software solution that is accessible
- **Indicator:** % of internal desktop software achieving accessibility standards.

2.3.9 ICT barrier #9

- There is currently no technical training provided regarding the accessibility features on VAC systems, applications, and devices.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #9

- Create a plan to provide technical training regarding the accessibility features on VAC systems, applications, and devices. Build specific training into our planning.
 - **Completed by:** June 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC has identified the most common accessibility features and is implementing and promoting accessibility features that users can easily use. VAC has developed technical training on how to ensure closed captioning is accurate, and how to make shared PowerPoint presentations over MS Teams accessible.

VAC intends to group all accessibility features in a learning path, so they are easier for users to identify. For example, VAC currently has a document outlining accessibility features in the M365 suite of tools. VAC also has a Tech Talk focusing on accessibility in Word, which is part of IT Training.

2.3.10 ICT barrier #10

- Accessibility enhancements (to VAC systems, applications, and devices) are not communicated or promoted.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #10

- Create a plan to identify, communicate, and promote accessibility enhancements (to VAC systems, applications, and devices).
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

Accessibility enhancements are currently communicated through VAC's IT Training Portal. In the past, VAC IT has had Tech Talk information sessions on certain accessible features. VAC will schedule regular Tech Talks regarding accessibility to ensure new features are being shared.

2.3.11 ICT barrier #11

- Providing in-home support for tasks such as equipment set-up has not been possible for numerous reasons (i.e., capacity, location, and health and safety risks).

Action #1 for ICT barrier #11

- Identify options to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities.
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024
(The action is pending further discussion with SSC's AAAC group and IT Procurement to look at options for contracting out in-home services.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is currently in discussions with Shared Services Canada's (SSC) Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) group and IT Procurement to review options for contracting out in-home services, ensuring that contracting services are available to properly evaluate requests. VAC will be tracking requests which includes: reporting who made the request and who went to provide the in-home services.

- **Indicators:**
 - # of requests for in-home services
 - # of requests fulfilled, who fulfilled in-home service request.
- **Target:** 100%

2.3.12 ICT barrier #12

- VAC's Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) Request Processing Software – AccessPro Case Management (APCM) is not fully accessible. In turn, response packages provided to requestors are not accessible.

Action #1 for ICT barrier #12

- Purchase and implement new processing software that is accessible.
 - **Completed by:** June 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

Procurement and implementation of the new processing software will be done through an agile implementation team. A product owner was identified and started on the project in early June 2023. The product owner is working with procurement to initiate the purchase of the tool and developing a project plan to reach the June 2024 deadline.

2.3.13 ICT barrier #13

- ATIP Operations does not currently provide an accessible telephone line (i.e., hearing impaired and/or deaf accessibility options).

Action #1 for ICT barrier #13

- VAC and SSC to implement an accessible telephone line (i.e., text telephone (TTY) functionality) for ATIP Operations to improve service for hearing-impaired or deaf clients.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SSC

- **Status:** Completed

The TTY accessible telephone line is active for ATIP Operations. The number has been published at the following link: [Access to Information and Privacy \(ATIP\) - Knowing your rights - Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

2.4 Communication (other than information and communication technologies)

Desired outcomes:

- Veterans Affairs Canada staff are equipped to design and deliver communications that are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are satisfied with the accessibility of VAC's communications.

2.4.1 Communication barrier #1

- In-person and virtual events are not always barrier-free.

Action #1 for communication barrier #1

- Develop accessibility-related references and tools for VAC-led commemorative events in Canada and abroad.
- In all International Operations Directorate event and project plans, include a new section providing an analysis of accessibility observations, barriers and/or mitigations.
- Address accessibility as a broad planning concept in development of International Operations Quality Visitor Experience (QVE) Strategy. This strategy will guide all planning efforts for visitor experience programming at VAC sites moving forward. For instance, accessibility-related questions will be included in 2022 Visitor Satisfaction Surveys conducted at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial.
- Continue to assess and make improvements to parking lots, walkways, and curbs on VAC-managed memorial sites in Europe.
 - **Completed by:** ~~December 2024~~ **Revised:** December 2025
(The date was extended to December 2025 because of delayed procurement in contracting the Accessibility Review and Visitor Experience Strategy.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CPA Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is making progress by working collaboratively to develop a standardized event planning guide and checklist to include accessibility observations, barriers and/or mitigations.

The process to begin developing the Quality Visitor Experience Strategy has started. VAC is making improvements to site infrastructure. Currently, all project plans take accessibility requirements into consideration.

2.4.2 Communication barrier #2

- Described video is not available for silent videos at VAC's visitor centres at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial.
- Subtitles need to be added to audio visual displays at these visitor centres.

Action #1 for communication barrier #2

- Add described video (audio) to silent videos in visitor centres.
- Add subtitles to audio visual displays in visitor centres.
 - **Completed by:** December 2024
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CPA Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

VAC is making progress by converting visitor information displays at Vimy to ensure that subtitles for all information are available. Planning is currently underway for both the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial and the Canadian National Vimy Memorial to include described video to silent videos.

2.5 The procurement of goods, services and facilities

Desired outcome:

- All goods and services procured by Veterans Affairs Canada are accessible.

2.5.1 The procurement of goods, services and facilities barrier #1

Some VAC staff are not familiar with accessibility best practices/requirements for procurement and contracting.

Action #1 for the procurement of goods, services and facilities barrier #1

- Incorporate accessibility-related considerations into procurement information sessions. These sessions will be offered to employees two times per year and will increase awareness of accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting.
- Establish ICT-specific standards that are required for all procurement for third-party built software.
- Establish accessibility standards for the procurement of equipment such as furniture and supplies.
 - **Completed by:** ~~June 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024
(This timeline was extended because the Government of Canada has not yet set standards for furniture accessibility. VAC intends to follow these standards once they have been established.)
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

Procurement information sessions that include information on accessibility-related considerations were launched in early 2023. These sessions will be offered to employees two times per year and will increase awareness of accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting. Two sessions were held: one 7 March 2023 for Administrative Assistants, with 123 employees in attendance; and on 8 March 2023 for Project Authorities/Manager, with 148 employees in attendance.

- **Indicator:** % of Procurement information sessions (2 sessions per year) that include content on accessibility considerations for procurement and contracting:
- **Target** = 100% by June 2024

The Government of Canada has adopted the European Standard EN 301 549 for ICT, which applies to procured ICT products and services as well as those developed internally. VAC is updating its procurement processes to ensure compliance with EN 301 549. Accessibility compliance requirements are now included in statements of work, and incorporated into VAC Procurement's Requests for Proposals, Information, Bids (RFx), etc. Consultation between VAC's Facilities and Procurement Units on furniture standards is being planned. PSPC Procurement's standard Bid (RFx) templates also include accessibility compliance requirements.

- **Indicator:** % of procurement activities in which the established GoC ICT Standards for third party built software are considered
- **Target:** 100% complete June 2024
- **Source:** Accessibility Consideration Indicator in VAC's Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP)

The Government of Canada has established procurement instruments such as mandatory standing offers and supply arrangements for the acquisition of furniture and supplies. The accessibility standards for procurement of furniture purchased through PSPC's mandatory supply arrangements align with the Government of Canada Workplace Fit-up Standard and the GCworkplace Design Guide. The GCworkplace Design Guide has been developed as the companion document to the Government of Canada Workplace Fit-up Standards and is mandatory for all planning and design of general-purpose office space.

- **Indicator:** % of procurement activities in which the accessibility standards established for the procurement of equipment (such as furniture and supplies) are considered
- **Target:** 100% complete by June 2024
- **Source:** Accessibility Consideration Indicator in VAC's Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP)

2.6 The design and delivery of programs and services

Desired outcomes:

- Veterans Affairs Canada staff are equipped to design and deliver programs and services that are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are satisfied with the accessibility of VAC's programs and services.

2.6.1 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #1

- Accessibility is not fully considered during the reporting phase for each audit and evaluation.

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #1

- Establish an accessibility requirements checklist to be reviewed and adhered to during the reporting phase for each audit and evaluation.
 - **Completed by:** June 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** Audit and Evaluation Division (AED)
 - **Status:** Completed

AED has developed a comprehensive checklist to be used during the reporting phase, which will help ensure the accessibility of all reports.

AED will also add a question to its client survey to confirm that, after completing each audit or evaluation, the client agrees that the final report prepared by AED is accessible.

2.6.2 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #2

- Direct client communication initiated by the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA) is by telephone. This may cause a barrier to those who are hard of hearing, who communicate using sign language, or those with verbal communication difficulties. Although MS Teams and My VAC Account are additional options for client communications, VAC does not use these tools to initiate client communication.
- Clients do not have IT support when using MS Teams.
- Not everyone has reliable access to a computer or the internet.

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #2

- Continue to maintain paper options for clients who wish to initiate and communicate by way of printed mail or My VAC Account.
- Ensure that all standard client communiqués (fact sheets and letters) meet accessibility standards.
 - **Completed by:** December 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA)
 - **Status:** Completed

BPA maintains paper options for clients and ensures that all standard client communiqués meet accessibility standards. BPA has established a procedure of capturing and reporting accessibility feedback obtained from clients to a centralized monitored inbox. Any accessibility feedback (verbal, mail and email) that BPA receives is being monitored and recorded.

2.6.3 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #3

- Disability Benefits (Pain and Suffering Compensation/Disability Pension) application steps are not clear, concise, or easy to understand. (Action wording revised)

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #3

- Make the application steps clear, concise and easy to understand, and provide better support material. This will be achieved through:
 - Consulting on how to improve the online application in My VAC Account; and
 - Reviewing application and communications material to ensure they meet applicants' needs.

- **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024
(This timeline was extended to allow time for consultation with stakeholders on how to improve certain applications in MY VAC Account. While consultation has taken place internally at VAC, further consultation needs to be completed with external stakeholders.)
- **Roles and responsibilities:** Service Delivery (SD) Branch with support from CPA Branch
- **Status:** In progress

SD Branch consulted with VAC's Innovation Hub on how to improve the online application in My VAC Account/Reviewing the application.

Minor changes to the Disability Benefits (Pain and Suffering Compensation/Disability Pension - PEN923) application (for both the paper application and My VAC Account application) are currently in progress.

SD Branch also completed a review of their communication material. They reviewed and updated the articles related to Disability Benefits. The updates were made to ensure that the reader clearly understands what is required and what VAC does with the information. The updates were posted on VAC's external site (May 2023):

- [What do I need to include in my application for a disability benefit? - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [How we review a disability benefit application - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

2.6.4 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #4

- Plain language needs to be used consistently in letters regarding disability benefits.

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #4

- Develop an approval process to ensure that plain language is used consistently in all letters regarding disability benefits.
 - **Completed by:** June 2024
 - **Roles and Responsibilities:** SD Branch
 - **Status:** In progress

SD Branch is making progress with the development of a plain language approval process for disability letters. Additionally, in preparation for the implementation, the Disability Benefits Program Management team members have completed Plain Language training.

2.6.5 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #5

- VAC's policies, programs and initiatives need to consider barriers and accessibility needs for individuals who are part of more than one equity-seeking group. For example, this would include a person who has a disability and is also part of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) communities, and/or who is Indigenous, or belongs to another equity-seeking group.

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #5

- Development of a Departmental GBA Plus policy and GBA Plus tools, training, and resources. Include a promotional plan for the policy and tools as a complement to accessibility considerations. (Action wording revised)
 - **Completed by:** June 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance (SPPP) Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

The GBA Plus Policy is complete and has been published both internally and externally. The GBA Plus Step Guide (training tool) is also complete and is being prepared for publication. The promotional plan includes promoting the GBA Plus Policy and Step Guide to all employees, as well as externally through VAC's monthly e-newsletter, *Salute!*.

2.6.6 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #6

- Consultation and engagement on VAC policy and program design is conducted on short timelines or in a way that is not accessible. For instance, the process may not provide enough time to Veterans with disabilities or other persons with disabilities to provide thoughtful feedback to inform these initiatives.

Action #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #6

- Expand and update the Disability Lens guidance in VAC's Policy Development Manual using feedback received through the fall 2021 Let's Talk Veterans consultation on accessibility.
 - **Completed by:** June 2023
 - **Roles and responsibilities:** SPPP Branch
 - **Status:** Completed

The Disability Lens guidance within VAC’s policy development manuals and guidelines has been updated to address feedback from the Let’s Talk Veterans accessibility consultation held in Fall 2021.

2.7 Transportation

Following a careful review of policies, practices, programs and services, no barriers were identified in this area.

2.8 Organizational culture

Desired outcome:

- Veterans Affairs Canada staff understand what accessibility means and why it matters, and are equipped to make the Department a more accessible and inclusive workplace and service provider.

VAC’s 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan noted that the Department would continue to:

- find opportunities to collaborate with the Accessibility Network on accessibility-related initiatives
- develop accessible templates
- arrange speaking opportunities, panels, and presentations about accessibility
- promote “Accessibility Confidence at VAC: A Playbook”
- learn about and plan accessible meetings and events
- facilitate informal meeting opportunities related to accessibility (i.e., lunch and learns)
- celebrate accessibility-related events to increase education and awareness
- promote outreach to the Department’s Ministerial Events team for advice on planning inclusive and accessible events

Progress on VAC’s Accessibility Culture Shift in 2023

VAC’s Accessibility Employee Survey

From May 3 - June 9, 2023, VAC launched its first-ever Accessibility Employee Survey. While the Department was encouraged by the responses received, due to a low response rate, these results may not be representative of VAC as a whole. With that said, the survey, to be conducted yearly, will provide the Department with an annual baseline measure of how VAC is progressing on its journey to become more accessibility confident (the extent to which VAC employees understand what accessibility is, and why it matters).

Survey respondents indicated that they they feel progress is being made in areas such as:

- initiatives to increase awareness and empathy around persons with disabilities and the barriers they face;
- the use of plain language;
- creating accessible content;
- initiatives to ensure that accessibility is modeled through all levels of the Department; and
- offering/promoting accessibility-related learning events, trainings, tools, and resources.

Feedback gathered through this survey will be considered as VAC develops progress reports on its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, as well as in developing strategies to continue advancing the Department's accessibility culture shift.

Updates to VAC's Accessibility@VAC intranet site

In 2023, content on the Accessibility@VAC intranet site was refreshed and updated bi-monthly to ensure that employees continued to have access to the most recent information, resources, and updates from the Accessibility Network.

The 'Accessibility Adopters' series and 'Accessibility Storytellers' initiatives continue to be a highlight of the **Accessibility@VAC intranet site**, and are updated regularly:

- The Accessibility Adopters series recognizes and celebrates employees who are taking steps to incorporate accessibility into their day-to-day work at VAC.
- VAC's Accessibility Storytellers, which sees VAC employees with disabilities (as well as their allies) share their lived experience/stories.

Promotion of accessibility-related learning opportunities offered by other organizations

Plain Language learning sessions offered by the Plain Language Community of Practice were promoted to VAC employees on a monthly basis. As of 30 September, 2023, 1042 public servants attended training, 491 of which were VAC employees. A VAC employee who completed the Plain Language training noted:

"I've had this training and I recommend it to everyone! Yes, it's a bit long, but necessary because our paradigms are well entrenched in the way we write to the government. You may be resistant to this new approach, however, you'll see that it's for the benefit of many more."

Other accessibility-related learning sessions (i.e., The Built Environment and Our Hybrid Workplace (Health Canada), Canadian Congress on Accessibility (ESDC) and Reflections on Accessibility: A Conversation with Yazmine Laroche (CAN)) continue to be promoted regularly.

In 2023, 13 events in English and French were promoted, including sessions/events offered by Employment and Social Development Canada; Shared Services Canada; Health Canada; the Canada School of Public Service; the Canada Accessibility Network; and Accessibility Standards

Canada. Additionally, the Department's Accessibility@VAC intranet site features 35 resources and learning opportunities from these organizations.

Development of more accessible templates

In 2023, VAC improved its approval sheet template to make the document more accessible. Meanwhile, development of a more accessible briefing note template is in progress.

In April 2022, the use of VAC's accessible PowerPoint template was made a requirement for presentations to the Department's governance table, Senior Management Committee. In 2023, VAC's Audit and Evaluation Division conducted a Management Assist audit regarding the use of this accessible template at VAC's senior management table, i.e., Senior Management Committee (SMC). The objectives of the Management Assist were to determine:

- the level of compliance of PowerPoint presentations brought to SMC between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023; and
- the obstacles or common issues that may hinder compliance with the guidance

While uptake of the template remains a work in progress, the Management Assist audit provided a baseline of areas where more awareness and education are required (i.e, developing effective alternative text, creating accessible tables, how to check reading order, use of plain language).

Accessibility-related content provided to program areas

Part of VAC's culture shift strategy is providing content that contributes to and maintains the conversation on accessibility to program areas. In 2023, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team continued to reach out to divisions across the Department to gain interest in receiving accessibility content for distribution to their employees.

Accessibility-related events and presentations

During International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2022, VAC's Innovation Hub, in partnership with the Accessibility Network and the Department's Accessibility Readiness Team, hosted VAC's first-ever accessibility panel, "We're All Different: Let's Be Different Together". The event was a great success, with four panelists from the Network and 540 VAC employees in attendance. Accessibility resources, including "Accessibility Confidence at VAC: A Playbook", were promoted during the panel. Moreover, considerable positive feedback was received, i.e. :

- "Wonderful session! I hope to attend more of these when offered. Great insights."
- "This was such a fantastic session! Thank you to all who made it possible, but especially to those of you willing to share your experiences."

- “Thanks for your sharing today, I really learned a lot and appreciate your courage in sharing so I can become better informed.”
- “Thank you for reiterating that ‘one size fits one’ (as opposed to ‘one size fits all’.) We are all ‘differently abled’ and should be able to work together to accomplish successfully that which can be done for the greater good by ensuring that we have that opportunity to do that “good work” together. Thanks so much for this presentation.”
- Two members of the Accessibility Network presented at the Department’s Health Professionals National Training event in April 2023. Over 200 employees attended and provided very positive feedback, i.e. :
 - “Absolutely loved having the panel come and speak about their lived experiences. It really helps put things into perspective (i.e., the challenges they had to face and overcome).”
 - “The personal stories had a big impact for me – very helpful and some lessons that will guide my practice.”

Three Network members also presented to 60 employees of the Bureau of Pension Advocates (BPA) in February and March 2023. In addition to sharing their lived experience, they discussed “Accessibility Confidence at VAC: A Playbook”. Participants provided feedback, and some of their key takeaways from the session were, i.e. :

- “The importance of making all documents accessible. The wider glimpse into how making documents and workspaces accessible for everyone can have an impact.”
- "We have a responsibility to people living with disabilities to provide a barrier-free environment and promote their full development. A clear illustration of the challenges and resources available. Very interesting presentation. Thank you very much!"

The Playbook is also available on the Accessibility@VAC intranet site.

Promotion of National AccessAbility Awareness Week and International Day of Persons with Disabilities

During International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2022 (IDPD), VAC hosted its first-ever accessibility panel, and promoted Government of Canada events and resources available on the Department’s Accessibility@VAC intranet site.

During National Accessibility Awareness Week 2023, VAC conducted the Accessibility Employee Survey, and promoted Government of Canada events and resources available on the Accessibility@VAC intranet site. Feedback on the article included:

- “Thank you Accessibility Readiness Team for highlighting all the different things we can do this week and beyond to learn, acknowledge and celebrate those with disabilities!”

Other accessibility culture-related progress at VAC

- The Department’s “Integrated Workplace Services Newsletter”, as well as the VAC’s Deputy Minister’s “Deputy Dispatch Newsletter”, are both available in accessible formats.
- VAC’s Communications division is working with Accessibility Standards Canada to increase employees’ capacity to deliver more accessible marketing and communications. A one-hour, virtual presentation held on 13 April 2023 gave 43 participants an understanding of what accessibility means, why it is important to create content that is accessible to everyone, and how people with various disabilities access content. Accessibility Services Canada is preparing a guide for VAC Communications Division employees, recapping major points from the training sessions relating to accessible communications. This product is currently under development.
- Within VAC’s Audit & Evaluation Division (AED):
 - internal documents are being reviewed to ensure adherence with accessibility standards identified in the checklist developed by and for AED;
 - an MS Teams channel has been created to allow divisional staff to share tools, best practices, and tips on accessibility and to create greater accessibility awareness and engagement.
 - a performance indicator has been included within Performance Management Agreements to ensure accessibility is considered as part of scoping audits and that final reports are written to meet accessibility requirements, as appropriate.

Moving forward, VAC remains committed to growing the Department’s accessibility-related learning and awareness through activities that can be sustained over time.

3. Consultations

Persons with disabilities were consulted in the preparation of this 2023 Progress Report.

3.1 Internal consultation

In 2021 and 2022, as required by the *Employment Equity Act*, VAC conducted a third-party Employment Systems Review. The Employment Systems Review Report is the product of several months of work conducting an analysis and review of VAC employment policies, practices, HR data, interviews and discussions with employees. The goal was to identify and

make recommendations to eliminate systemic, cultural, and attitudinal barriers to create a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace environment. This work included consultation (interviews and focus groups) with 22 VAC employees with disabilities. The evidence from this review informed this Progress Report (i.e., the need for improvements to the Department's Duty to Accommodate process, as well as to workforce representation).

Furthermore, through regular communication and meetings held via MS Teams, members of the Accessibility Network (approximately 20 employees with visible and invisible disabilities) were consulted on the first year of progress since the implementation of VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025. To remove barriers to participation during consultations and Accessibility Network meetings, incoming Network members are asked to provide any information that would assist in enabling their participation. Additionally, reference documents are circulated to members before meetings, members are regularly made aware of accessibility features within the MS Teams platform, and simultaneous interpretation in official languages is available.

During Accessibility Network meetings, members were encouraged to provide feedback at any time regarding progress, by phone or in writing (anonymously or non-anonymously). More specifically, during the May 2023 Network meeting, members were provided a comprehensive update on the 2023 Progress Report draft, and were asked:

- If they had any comments or concerns regarding the plans to consult them on the 2023 Progress Report; and
- If they had any feedback to provide regarding any progress the Department had made to date in implementing the 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan?

Similarly, the September 2023 Network meeting was spent consulting the membership on the 2023 Progress Report. A draft version of the Report was distributed to all Network members five business days in advance of the meeting, which was facilitated by a member of VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team. Open discussion of the draft Progress Report was encouraged and questions were posed to prompt members on their thoughts and opinions, including:

- Are there any additional actions that you think should have been added?
- Do you agree with the re-wording of some actions?
- Do you think this re-worded barrier is better refined?

Members discussed the draft Report, noting ways to make the format of the report more accessible. For example, providing a summary of progress, ensuring the headings were clear and distinct to allow easier navigation; and adding some hyperlinks.

All feedback received was considered, and either incorporated in this progress report or retained for future consideration.

Network members were also provided with two weeks to follow up with the Department's Accessibility Readiness Team to provide feedback in writing (anonymously or non-anonymously), or over the phone.

Consultations on the 2023 Progress Report provided the opportunity to ask persons with disabilities at VAC for their feedback on how the Plan is being implemented, based on their lived experience. Network members noted that the implementation of action items was progressing well. Further comments included suggestions and clarifications to actions and barriers, such as ways to improve the accessibility of workspaces and health and safety measures in a hybrid environment

VAC looks forward to continuing its work with the Accessibility Network in the identification of barriers and opportunities for improvement – all as part of its journey to becoming a more accessibility confident organization.

3.2 External consultation

VAC did not conduct any external consultation on this 2023 Progress Report, as most action items identified in VAC's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan that are relevant to clients and other external stakeholders (and on which they might be able to assess action status and impact) will not be implemented until after the writing of this Report. VAC looks forward to consulting Veterans and other external stakeholders on future progress reports and accessibility action plans when more action items have been implemented, and related progress on accessibility can be more readily and meaningfully assessed from an external perspective.

4. Feedback

In December 2022, with the publication of its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, the Department created and published four mechanisms through which employees and/or members of the public could provide accessibility-related feedback: mail, email, telephone, and an [anonymous online feedback form](#).

Accessibility-related feedback received to date, including on how VAC is implementing its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, has confirmed many of the accessibility barriers and actions outlined in the Plan, while also identifying new barriers and possible solutions to remove and prevent them.

At the time of this progress report's publication, VAC had received 47 pieces of feedback through its four newly-created accessibility feedback mechanisms. The primary method by which VAC received feedback was email (23 pieces of feedback), followed by its anonymous

online feedback form (20 pieces of feedback). VAC received no feedback by telephone or by letter mail. An additional 4 pieces of feedback were shared through pre-existing Departmental communication platforms, such as MS Teams.

Of the 47 pieces of feedback received, 39 went beyond the scope of VAC's work to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. However, with the consent of the individual who provided it, this feedback was redirected to the appropriate area within the Department for consideration/action as appropriate.

Eight pieces of feedback received were within the scope of VAC's work to remove and prevent accessibility barriers, i.e.:

- Feedback: A VAC area office requires more designated parking for Veterans.
 - In response to this feedback, VAC's Real Property & Facilities Management team provided awareness to the management team about parking options, the relevant parking provisions, and the process in place to amend facility parking requirements. Additionally, the Department's Real Property and Facilities Management team will explore opportunities that will enhance awareness of facility management responsibilities in order to ensure that VAC continues to improve accessibility in its facilities.

- Feedback: The interview rooms at one of VAC's area offices have extremely heavy doors, and do not have button-activated door-openers.
 - In response to this feedback, VAC is reviewing and considering its responsibilities to meet all necessary building codes, safety regulations, and accessibility standards. Additionally, the Department's Real Property and Facilities Management team will explore opportunities to enhance awareness of facility management responsibilities.

- Feedback: Graphs used in the results of VAC's Employee Pulse Survey must be accompanied by alternative text.
 - In response to this feedback, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team followed up with the area responsible for VAC's Employee Pulse Survey to provide resources to the area responsible for the Pulse Survey so that, moving forward, they can ensure that results are developed and posted with accessibility in mind, including through the use of alternative text as appropriate.

- Feedback: A Veteran who regularly uses text-to-speech software reported having difficulty reading PDF format documentation on their My VAC Account.
 - In response to this feedback, the Department provided the Veteran with the name of a different, free assistive technology (i.e., NVDA) which will allow the Veteran to read PDF documentation on their My VAC Account.

- Feedback: A VAC employee requested a simple way for VAC employees to identify and report software accessibility issues, potentially through the introduction of software accessibility ambassadors from the Accessibility Network and/or VAC's IT Service Desk.
 - In response to this feedback, the Department:
 - will engage with users to enhance the online VAC Accessibility Feedback Tool
 - will engage the Accessibility Network and the National IT Service Desk to discuss the potential for software accessibility ambassadors
 - is planning Accessibility Ambassador Training for some of VAC's IT staff, and will explore the potential to adapt this training to non-IT employees.

- Feedback: The time-out feature in VAC's Workplace Entry Scheduling Tool (WEST), originally set for five minutes, was causing issues from the perspective of a VAC employee who uses a screen reader.
 - In response to this feedback, VAC increased the length of its WEST time-out feature to ten minutes.

- Feedback: A VAC employee indicated the need to simplify the employee accommodations process.
 - This barrier, and action items proposing to remove it (including through the eventual launch of a Disability Management Unit), are provided for in VAC's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan.

- Feedback: A VAC employee noted the ongoing need for plain language communications, and support for some Veterans and clients who deal with the organization.
 - This barrier, and action items proposing to remove it (i.e., VAC's provision of support to third-party groups to help those going through the Department's application process, development of an approval process to ensure that plain language is used consistently in all letters regarding disability benefits), are provided for in VAC's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan.

5. What we have learned

At this stage of its accessibility journey, VAC has learned that it is committed and engaged in its efforts to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers. With that said, in these early days, the Department acknowledges that accessibility planning is a learning process.

This speaks to the importance of the recurring nature of accessibility planning, not to mention the ongoing need to consult persons with disabilities. VAC looks forward to continuing to adapt

its plans as new challenges are identified, as certain action items do (or do not) materialize as expected, and in response to the discovery of new or unexpected barriers.

As the Department moves forward on its journey to become accessibility confident, VAC also recognizes that it should strengthen its performance measurement capacity. This is something that VAC will continue to work on in upcoming Progress Reports and Action Plans.

6. Training

- In May 2021, VAC's Centralized Operations Division launched an e-learning module entitled Trauma-Informed Support Training. This course provides a basic overview of the principles of trauma-informed service, specifically in relation to those who have experienced military sexual trauma/sexual misconduct. The training is available to all employees who would like to participate.

As of July 2023, 1889 employees have completed this course.

- VAC's Procurement Unit will develop and offer two sessions/year to all VAC employees to increase awareness of accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting.

Procurement information sessions that include information on accessibility-related considerations were launched in early 2023. These sessions will be offered to employees two times per year and will increase awareness of accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting. Two sessions were held: one on 7 March 2023 for Administrative Assistants, with 123 employees in attendance; and one 8 March 2023 for Project Authorities/Manager, with 148 employees in attendance.

- VAC's Action Plan also introduced mandatory training:
 - for managers to learn more on the duty to accommodate (i.e., through requiring completion of CSPA course INC120, "Disability Management and Workplace Wellness"); and
 - for all VAC staff to complete CSPA course INC115, "Addressing Disability Inclusion and Identifying Barriers to Accessibility."

In fall 2023, all VAC employees and managers were advised of these new mandatory training requirements.

- Completion rates will be tracked and reported on, with updates provided to VAC leaders, especially where low completion rates are identified.
- Training will be promoted with all new employees and managers via Map Your Career and onboarding process.

- Progress on this mandatory training will be tracked by monitoring the % of completed training. The Department will target all existing employees and managers to have completed their mandatory training by no later than 31 December 2024.

7. Glossary

For more definitions, please refer to the [Glossary of the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#) and the [Accessible Canada Act](#).

7.1 Definitions

Accessibility – The degree to which a product, service, program or environment is available to be accessed or used by all (Source: [Glossary: Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#)).

Accessible by design – This is a design process in which the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered. Accessibility sometimes refers to the characteristic that products, services, and facilities can be independently used by people with a variety of disabilities (Source: [Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology](#)).

Accessibility-confident – VAC staff understand what accessibility means and why it matters, and are equipped to make the Department a more accessible and inclusive service provider and employer.

Accessibility Network – The Network provides the opportunity for employees with a disability, as well as their allies, to help identify accessibility barriers within the Department, and to provide feedback on the plans under development for a more accessibility-confident VAC. This group provides feedback and input based on their lived experiences and help guide VAC towards being a more accessibility-confident Department.

Accommodation – This term refers to the design and adaptation of a work environment to meet the needs of a diverse workforce, and do what is required in the circumstances of each individual, to avoid discrimination up to the point of undue hardship.

Barrier – A barrier includes anything physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation (Source: [Accessible Canada Act, S.C. 2019, c. 10](#)).

Disability – Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society (Source: [Accessible Canada Act, S.C. 2019, c. 10](#)).

Duty to accommodate (DTA) – Employers have a duty to accommodate employees to avoid discrimination based on the eleven grounds identified in [section 2 of the Canadian Human Rights Act \(CHRA\)](#). Employers must accommodate employees who fall into the groups protected by the CHRA up to the point of undue hardship (Source: VAC’s internal Employment Equity and Diversity Action Plan 2017-2022).

Employment equity - The [Employment Equity Act](#) sets out requirements for Canadian employers, private and public, to proactively increase the representation of four designated groups: women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and visible minorities. (Source: VAC’s internal Employment Equity and Diversity Action Plan 2017-2022).

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) – An analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. The “plus” in GBA Plus acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. GBA Plus also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability. By incorporating GBA Plus throughout VAC’s policy, planning and operations, VAC will better understand how activities may impact Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP members, their families, and VAC employees.

GC Workplace Accessibility Passport – The Accessibility Passport is a tool that promotes collaboration between public service employees and managers. It will allow them to promptly identify and implement the devices, tools, and support measures that will enable employees to succeed in their job. The Passport is owned by the employee and will document adjustment needs, possible solutions, devices or supports received in the past, and adaptive tools that the employee would like to bring with them, should they change jobs or organizations.

Plain language – This refers to clear, straight-forward writing. It avoids obscure vocabulary and complex sentences. Writing in plain language does not mean over-simplifying or leaving out critical information. Using plain language makes critical information accessible and readable for everyone.

Screen reader - A screen reader is a software application that enables people with severe visual impairments to use a computer. (Source: [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#))

Unconscious bias - An implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation or assumption that can occur without one’s knowledge, control or intention. Unconscious bias is a result of one’s life

experiences and affects all types of people. Everyone carries implicit or unconscious biases. Examples of unconscious bias include gender bias, cultural bias, race/ethnicity bias, age bias, language and institutional bias. Decisions made based on unconscious bias can compound over time to significantly impact the lives and opportunities of others who are affected by the decisions one makes. (Source: [Creating an Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Research Environment: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention](#)).

Appendix A

VAC terminology

For information on VAC's terminology, please refer to the [Organization](#) and [Resources](#) pages on the [Veterans Affairs Canada](#) website.

Accessibility progress tool – This tool, used by the Application Management Directorate, refers to automated and manual methods to track applications in scope; complete accessibility assessments; and check EN 301 549 compliance status of each application as improvements are made over time.

[Audit and Evaluation Division](#) – This division has a dual role of providing both audits and evaluations for the Department. Audit provides independent and objective assurance as well as advisory services designed to improve operations within the Department. Evaluation judges the merit, worth or value of programs or services, based on the neutral collection and analysis of evidence. Evaluation informs decision making, improvements, innovation and accountability.

[Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial](#) – Located in northern France, this memorial stands as an important symbol of remembrance and a lasting tribute to all Newfoundlanders who served during the First World War. A great bronze caribou – the emblem of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment – forms the heart of the memorial.

[Bureau of Pensions Advocates](#) (BPA) – BPA provides free advice, assistance and representation for individuals dissatisfied with decisions rendered by VAC with respect to their claims for entitlement to disability benefits, or any assessment awarded for their claimed conditions. The Bureau's advocates are dedicated exclusively to assisting clients in the redress process.

[Canadian National Vimy Memorial](#) – This memorial honours all Canadians who served during the First World War. It bears the names of those who died in France with no known grave and is located at the site of Canada's victory during the Battle of Vimy Ridge in northern France.

Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services (CFOCS) – This branch is responsible for supporting VAC to meet Government of Canada requirements in areas such as financial stewardship, corporate reporting and key accountabilities. The branch also provides internal corporate services including human resources, finance, information technology, information management, security and administration, procurement and contracting, integrated planning, and access to information and privacy activities.

Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) – This is an aging integrated system that supports VAC employees in delivering Departmental benefits and services.

Commemoration and Public Affairs – This branch is responsible for commemorating the achievements and sacrifices of those who served and continue to serve Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace. It also engages meaningfully with stakeholders and provides accessible, timely, accurate, clear, and objective communications services and products to Veterans, their families, VAC employees and Canadians in both official languages.

Commemorative Partnership Program (CPP) – This program funds organizations who undertake remembrance initiatives that honour those who served Canada and keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

Corporate Secretariat – This division supports the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and Departmental senior management by coordinating Ministerial briefings, monitoring and supporting the Departmental governance committees, Parliamentary and Cabinet activities, as well as managing Ministerial correspondence and the Client Relations Unit.

European Operations – This division acts as a leader, steward and catalyst for remembrance overseas. The Division's mandate is to represent Veterans Affairs Canada in Europe on all matters that affect the commemoration of Canada's war dead and the contribution of Canadian Forces in times of peace and war.

European Standard (EN 301 549) – EN 301 549 is the European Standard for Digital Accessibility that the Government of Canada is adopting for ICT. The industry standard for web accessibility is W3C WCAG ([World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)). EN 301 549 includes WCAG plus accessibility standards for all other digital products, including mobile phones, electronic documents, software, and hardware.

Funeral and Burial Program – This is a program administered by the Last Post Fund on behalf of VAC that provides funeral, burial and grave marking benefits to eligible Canadian and Allied Veterans.

GCcase – This is an integrated system that supports VAC employees in delivering Departmental benefits and services.

[Last Post Fund](#) (LPF) – LPF is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that no Veteran is denied a dignified funeral and burial, as well as a military gravestone, due to insufficient funds at the time of death.

[Let's Talk Veterans](#) (LTV) – LTV is an online accessible consultation and engagement platform launched in 2021 to give Canadians, Veterans and their families the opportunity to provide direct feedback to VAC.

[My VAC Account](#) – This tool is a public-facing client portal that enables Veterans to apply for benefits, send secure messages, and track applications online with VAC.

[Office of the Veterans' Ombud](#) (OVO) – This Office ensures that Veterans and their families are treated fairly and have access to the programs and services that contribute to their wellbeing. They also study and recommend ways to make these programs better.

Service Delivery (SD) – This branch is responsible for delivering benefits and services and for providing social and economic support that respond to the needs of Veterans, our other clients and their families.

Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance – This branch is responsible for ensuring that VAC programs and policies remain relevant and meet the current and future needs of our clients. This branch also developing strategic partnerships in support of program and policy development.

[Veterans Review and Appeal Board](#) (VRAB) – The Board provides an independent avenue of review and appeal for disability decisions made by VAC. If a client decides to appeal a disability benefits decision from VAC, they can choose to have a BPA lawyer present their case.

Veteran-centric – Veterans are at the centre of everything we do: our philosophies, our ideas, our operations. To be Veteran-centric means we are proactive, responsive and compassionate to the needs of Veterans and their families, and ensuring they have all the benefits and services for which they are eligible. We will continue to streamline our processes to make them easier to follow.

Appendix B

Other government departments and services

For more information, please refer to the Government of Canada list of [departments and agencies](#).

Government of Canada ICT Maturity Model and Scorecard – The Government of Canada (GC) Accessible ICT Maturity Model and Scorecard identifies eight dimensions that are considered necessary to [making ICT accessible to all](#). There are five maturity levels for each dimension. Level 1 is the initial level and level 5 is the optimizing level. There are key building blocks for each of these maturity levels.

[Public Services and Procurement Canada \(PSPC\)](#) – This department plays an important role in the daily operations of the Government of Canada as a key provider of services for federal departments and agencies. PSPC supports them in the achievement of their mandated objectives as central purchasing agent, linguistic authority, real property manager, treasurer, accountant, integrity adviser, and pay and pension administrator.

[Shared Services Canada \(SSC\)](#) – This department was created in 2011 to transform how the government manages and secures its information technology (IT) infrastructure. They deliver digital services to Government of Canada organizations, providing modern, secure, and reliable IT services so federal organizations can deliver digital programs and services that meet Canadians’ needs.

[Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology program \(AAACT\)](#) – AACT is a Shared Services Canada program that provides services and solutions to help the public service serve all Canadians, including those with disabilities. AACT provides expertise in accessible digital content ensuring GC products and services are available to everyone. They offer training, tools, and testing services to help departments create accessible digital content (i.e., documents, presentations, and web content) that is inclusive by design.

[Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat \(TBS\)](#) – This secretariat is the administrative branch of the committee of ministers responsible for the financial management of the federal government (Treasury Board). It is a central agency of the Government of Canada. The role of the Secretariat is to support the Treasury Board and to provide advice to Treasury Board members in the management and administration of the Government.

[Women and Gender Equality Canada \(WAGE\)](#) – WAGE is the lead federal department responsible for advancing gender equality, including with respect to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada’s economic, social, and political life.