



Veterans Affairs  
Canada

Anciens Combattants  
Canada

# **Veterans' understanding of program information and eligibility requirements for the Veterans Independence Program and Disability Benefits webpages on veterans.gc.ca**

## **Executive Summary**

**Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada**

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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.**

**Canada**

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January 2024

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# Executive summary

## A. Background and objectives

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) retained Nanos Research to conduct focus groups among non-client Veterans and non-client family members and caregivers of Veterans in the form of online focus groups<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the research was to allow VAC to assess the understanding and perceptions of non-client Veterans, their families and caregivers regarding web content for two of VAC's most used programs and services. The study also seeks to identify—in terms of program information and eligibility criteria—possible barriers for new and potential clients.

The specific research objectives were:

- To understand the level of clarity Veterans have around the information on the VAC website regarding the top two most used VAC programs ([Veterans Independence Program](#) and [Disability Benefits](#));
- To clarify participants' understanding of the information presented to them for the two previously mentioned programs;
- To identify any barriers—perceived by participants within the information about these programs—contained on the VAC web pages they were presented; and,
- To improve existing methods of outreach and communication to non-client Veterans, their families and caregivers who may benefit from VAC programs and services but who are aware they are eligible.

The overall objective of the research was to help inform VAC's decisions on how to reach, communicate with and better inform the entire Veteran community in Canada.

## B. Methodology

Nanos conducted 10 online focus groups among Canadians who have served in the Canadian military, their families and caregivers, 18 years of age and older, who have not received benefits in the past or present. The focus groups were held between 5-13 December 2023. Two (2) of the groups were conducted in French and eight (8) were conducted in English.

The configuration of the groups were:

### Non-client Veterans

- 2 groups with Veterans from Western Canada (ENG)
- 2 groups with Veterans from Atlantic Canada (ENG)
- 2 groups with Veterans from Ontario (ENG)
- 1 group with Veterans from Quebec (FR)

### Family Members/Caregivers

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<sup>1</sup>Non-client refers to those who have not accessed any VAC services

- 2 groups with family members/caregivers (ENG)
- 1 group with family members/caregivers (FR)

Across all groups, 83 participants were recruited and 63 attended. Participants received a \$100 honorarium. Focus group sessions were about 90 minutes in duration.

Participants were **not** shown the web content prior to the focus groups. Prior to discussing a web page, the moderator showed participants the web page via screenshare. They were then sent the web link via the group chat and given five (5) minutes to review the content prior to discussing as a group. This process was repeated for the web content shown in Modules B and C.

Focus group research is qualitative and directional in nature and must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion—or number of individuals in the population—who hold a particular opinion. The focus group research allows VAC to gauge the views and gather in-depth insights from specific communities of interest.

For a detailed methodology, including the profile of participants, please see Appendix A. For screenshots of the webpages shown to participants, please see Appendix B.

### **C. Contract value**

The total contract value was \$59,861.75 (HST included).

**Supplier name:** Nanos Research

PWGSC contract number: CW2300408

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For more information, contact Veterans Affairs Canada at [veterans.gc.ca](https://veterans.gc.ca).

### **D. Political neutrality statement and contact information**

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify, as a Representative of Nanos Research, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Government of Canada’s Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, party standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



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## E. Key findings

### Awareness and use of veterans.gc.ca and My VAC Account

- Overall, most participants were aware of VAC websites, with veterans.gc.ca being mentioned most often. When prompted specifically, participants generally said they had heard of veterans.gc.ca before, and many had also heard of My VAC Account, though a few noted they had never visited the site.
- After prompting by the moderator, about half the participants in the family and caregiver groups said they had heard of My VAC Account, but noted they weren't very familiar with it or had heard of it several years ago. A few noted they had never heard of it, including they assume from the name it is similar to CRA My Account or Service Canada. Among participating Veterans, most said they had heard of My VAC Account before, saying they had heard of it either through VAC, in the news, or on social media and the internet, as well as LinkedIn, or through an internet search or an advertisement.
- Participants in both streams most often said they think veterans.gc.ca is the main website for VAC, with a few saying they believe that My VAC Account is a more specific page for users. A few participants said they had visited VAC websites previously, having heard of them through word of mouth, conferences, school or having searched online.

### Ease of understanding information on VAC webpages

#### Disability Program Page

- Most participating family/caregivers and Veterans found it easy or somewhat easy to understand the sections in the program pages, with all participating family members or caregivers finding it easy or somewhat easy to understand the "About this Program" section, to understand what is needed to apply, and to understand how to apply. Participating Veterans mostly found the "About this Program" section easy to understand as well; however, they did have some difficulties understanding the disability corrective payment section, as well as what is needed to qualify and how to apply for it.
- Participants in both streams often praised the straightforward, simple information, plain language and use of quick links as contributors to their ease of understanding. They also offered some suggestions to increase understanding, which include:
  - providing definitions of terms;
  - clearly stating the benefits offered by the program;
  - listing all the documentation needed in order to apply; and,
  - shortening the page (or providing a link tree up top) to avoid having to scroll, which can cause issues on a cellphone.
- Across both streams, there was a bit more confusion on understanding the "Disability pension corrective payment" section, especially amongst participating Veterans. While a number of participants said it was short, simple and the bullet points made it easy to understand, others said they found it confusing, especially as it only applies to a small group of people. These participants weren't sure if someone

would know to look at this section, or if it was in the right place. Some participants said they had to re-read the information a few times to understand it and suggested adding additional clarification. Others mentioned it doesn't explain what corrective payments are, how a corrective payment could impact their families or how to tell if they are eligible for one.

### **Veterans Independence Program Page**

- Although there was less of a consensus on the understanding of the sections within the program webpage, most participants found the pages to be easy or somewhat easy to understand.
- Participants mentioned the following as contributors to the ease of understanding the information on the page:
  - the plain language;
  - the format used; and,
  - the inclusion of contact numbers.
- They did note some concerns, including:
  - a lack of clarity in the beginning of the text on eligibility/how the program works with other programs;
  - confusion related to the ease of contract bed criteria and how that would impact eligibility; and,
  - confusion regarding how the benefits may differ by province.
- Participants shared suggestions on how to improve different aspects of the page, including:
  - definitions of the various terms;
  - providing examples of how the process works and what applications look like;
  - a section that outlines all the documentation needed to apply, specifying what assistance can be provided;
  - shortening the page to reduce scrolling and being more mobile friendly; and,
  - ensuring the back button functions, so they don't lose their spot on the page.

### **Identifying information gaps on VAC webpages**

#### **Disability Program Page**

- Overall, participants in both streams reiterated that they found the page generally easy to understand. They did identify some information to add to the pages, including:
  - what benefits are available for different types of disability;
  - what proof of disability is required and how that could be obtained; and,
  - what forms or documentation is required for the application process, as well as more information in the program description.
- Participating Veterans also suggested:
  - the addition of timelines for the application process;
  - to better clarify what corrective payments are;
  - examples of applications for different types of cases; and,
  - a way to quickly check if they are eligible before they begin the application process (other than the list of eligibility criteria).

## **Veterans Independence Program Page**

- In terms of information missing from the page, participants mentioned the following:
  - adding a section that outlines the scope of the program;
  - additional and clearer information on the availability of the program outside bigger cities;
  - a way to quickly and easily confirm eligibility before applying (on behalf of themselves or someone else);
  - adding more detailed information to the “Find out More” section; and,
  - providing information on what to do, or who to contact, if their application is denied.

## **Recommendations to improve clarity of information**

### **Disability Program Page**

- Both streams had a number of recommendations to improve the program page, including:
  - a mobile-friendly layout (shortening the page so there is less need to scroll, adding a “back to top” button);
  - more and better definitions of terms throughout;
  - clarifying the qualifications with examples, including a list of all documentation needed to apply;
  - clearly stating the contact information and telephone numbers up front and throughout the page;
  - adding quick links for how to apply or receive the benefit and a link tree up to the top of the page;
  - moving the payment dates up to the top of the page; and
  - ensuring text clearly identifies hyperlinks as they found the simple underline easy to miss.

### **Veterans Independence Program Page**

- Participating family members/caregivers and Veterans provided numerous recommendations to improve the clarity of information on the page, most often mentioning:
  - providing further clarification and definitions for terms;
  - an information or link index to make it easier to navigate the sections;
  - clearly stating the qualifications and criteria;
  - providing more detail on what is available in each city;
  - increasing the font size;
  - clearly stating the payment dates up at the top of the page;
  - adding more colour and visual interest; and,
  - adjusting the tone of the information to be more welcoming and friendly and less clinical or bureaucratic.