**Veterans Review and Appeal Board Canada**

**Tribunal des anciens combattants (révision et appel) Canada**

# Veterans Review and Appeal Board 2023 Accessibility Progress Report

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Canada

# The Veterans Review and Appeal Board's Accessibility Progress Report 2023

Note: As of the date of publication, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's 2023 Accessibility Progress Report has been verified for accessibility. If you have any issues with this Report, please contact the Board by email at VRABAccessibility-AccessibilitéTACRA@vrab-tacra.gc.ca, or else by telephone, mail, or anonymously using the contact information provided on pages 7 and 8.

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# 1. General

## 1.1 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, including the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (the Board; the VRAB) 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, and
- transportation.

The VRAB's 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan (the Plan) identifies a number of actions to take to prevent and remove accessibility barriers in these priority areas and, importantly, identifies additional actions to support the Board in advancing its accessibility culture shift.

It should be noted that while the VRAB is responsible for publishing and maintaining its own accessibility action plan, the Board has a long-standing service relationship with Veterans Affairs Canada (the Department, VAC) for internal services under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU outlines the agreement between the two organizations regarding their shared resources. Accordingly, the Board will benefit directly from VAC's efforts to improve accessibility in many of the corporate pillars. Some of the services the Board receives from VAC under the established MOU include:

- human resources,
- information technology,
- procurement,
- finance, and
- communications.

The Board is proud to release this 2023 Accessibility Progress Report, which highlights our progress since the Board's 2022-2025 Plan was released. 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. Any progress made in 2023 that is not addressed in this Report will be covered in the 2024 Progress Report. Furthermore, at the time this Report was ready for publication, the implementation of actions in

response to its 2022 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) results was still underway.

The Board also notes that its 2023 Accessibility Progress Report served as an opportunity to review the commitments in its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, including to update and refine certain barriers, action items, and timelines.

Through the VRAB's accessibility action plans and related progress reports, the Board aims to create an environment where persons with disabilities can fully participate and contribute, whether when coming to the Board for decisions, or as Members or staff of the Board. The VRAB will continue to work diligently to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers so that Veterans and their family members can fully participate in their dealings with the Board, and Members and staff can work to their full potential, resulting in enhanced service to Veterans and Canadians. The VRAB will embrace the opportunity to report back annually on progress, and to strengthen its performance measurement capacity. Through updated accessibility action plans and progress reports, the Board will hold itself to account, and will also respond to the Clerk of the Privy Council's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion.

## 1.2  Message from the Chair

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is committed to serving Veterans to enable them to obtain the benefits to which they are entitled to for service-related disabilities. We want to ensure that everyone coming before the Board can fully participate in the redress process and that our staff are supported in their work.

I am pleased to share the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's first annual progress report on our 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, which describes the Board's work toward preventing and removing barriers and creating a more accessible and inclusive environment.

As we move forward, the Accessibility Action Plan will continue to serve as our roadmap. We are committed to continuously reviewing and adapting the plan to ensure that the Board is a workplace that is barrier-free.

There is still much work to be done; however, we look forward to continuing to grow our knowledge and skills in this area. As we deepen our awareness and understanding of what accessibility means and why it matters, we will enhance our service delivery to Veterans and their families and strengthen our commitment to being a supportive and inclusive workplace. The Veterans Review and Appeal Board shares the vision of the Government of Canada with regard to accessibility – a Canada without barriers by 2040 – and will continue to take steps towards greater inclusion for all, now and in the future.

Thank you,

Christopher J. McNeil, Chairperson

## 1.3  Accessibility statement

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board is committed to providing inclusive and accessible service through the following fundamental accessibility principles:

- Everyone is treated with dignity.
- Everyone must be able to participate fully and equally.
- Laws, regulations, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the ways that different kinds of barriers and discrimination intersect.
- Persons with disabilities must be involved in developing and designing laws, policies, programs, and services.

The Board's goal is to ensure that all Veterans can fully participate in the redress process and to provide a barrier-free, inclusive workplace for all Board Members and staff.

# 2.  Process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback

The Act and the Accessible Canada Regulations require federally regulated entities, including the Board, to establish a process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback.

Feedback on accessibility can include your thoughts on:

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

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, and
- systemic.

## 2.1 How to provide your feedback

### 2.1.1 Feedback for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Please send questions or feedback related to the VRAB's Accessibility Action Plan, or accessibility at the VRAB in general, in any of the following ways:

#### 2.1.1.1 Email

VRABAccessibility-AccessibilitéTACRA@vrab-tacra.gc.ca

#### 2.1.1.2 Phone

- Toll-free: 1-800-450-8006
- TDD/TTY: 1-833-998-2060

#### 2.1.1.3 Mail

Director General
Veterans Review and Appeal Board
125 Maple Hills Ave
Charlottetown, PE C1C 0B6

#### 2.1.1.4 Online

Through the anonymous feedback form on the VRAB's website.

#### 2.1.1.5 Alternate formats

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

- the VRAB's Accessibility Action Plan,
- the VRAB's description of its accessibility-related feedback process,
- the VRAB's annual progress reports on the implementation of the VRAB's Accessibility, and
- 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), and

- electronic (an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities).

# 3. Areas described under section 5 of the Act

## 3.1 Employment

**Desired outcomes:**

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

### 3.1.1 Employment barrier #1 – Inclusive hiring

- Persons with disabilities may be under-represented in the VRAB's hiring, acting appointments, and promotions. This could 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, and
  – the VRAB not being perceived as an accessible and inclusive workplace.

#### 3.1.1.1 Actions for employment barrier #1

- Use VAC's expanding tools for more accessible and inclusive hiring with the goal of closing the representation gaps for persons with disabilities:

  – Implement an "Attestation of Impartiality and Diversity Form", where selection board members can document that they belong to equity seeking communities.
  – Where appropriate, work with VAC to use the planned repository of names of qualified equity-seeking community members who are interested in participating in assessment boards.
  – Incorporate an "Articulation of Selection Decision Form" that highlights key employment equity considerations in the selection of candidates.
  – Work with VAC to access their planned Accommodation Assessment Ambassadors (among staffing advisors), to support hiring managers in offering timely and appropriate accommodation measures during staffing processes.

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

  – Coordinate sessions for VRAB Directors and Managers to promote diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including the demystifying of common misunderstandings associated with the recruitment of persons with disabilities.
  – Continue to consider opportunities for additional hiring through programs such as the Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities.

- Promote the VRAB as an inclusive workplace for employees with disabilities:

  – Undertake a review of language used in recruitment communications to ensure it is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive.
  – Offer opportunities for VRAB staff to participate in a VAC-led learning series on "How to Apply on a Process", 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.

    ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023,
    ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
    ♦ **Status:** Complete.

### 3.1.1.2 Progress on employment barrier #1

- The Board has implemented the "Attestation of Impartiality and Diversity Form," which provides a commitment to impartiality and an unbiased assessment, as well as the opportunity for voluntary self-identification of selection board members who belong to equity-deserving groups.

- The Board is using the Articulation of Selection Decision document, which guides managers in describing and documenting their selection decision when appointing a candidate. By requiring a fact-based explanation of appointment decisions, the document seeks to hold organizations accountable in ensuring staffing is as unbiased as possible.

- The Board is also committed to working with VAC to access their Assessment Accessibility Ambassadors as required to support hiring managers in offering timely and appropriate accommodation measures during staffing processes.

- In 2024, the VRAB will work with VAC to organize a session for Board leadership to discuss and promote diverse and inclusive staffing practices, including the demystifying of common misunderstandings associated with the recruitment of persons with disabilities.

- Within the past two years, the VRAB hired an individual through the Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities. While this program is set to end in March 2025 and recruitment for the program is now complete, the VRAB will continue to consider opportunities to run hiring processes directed toward persons with disabilities, as well as the following talent sources:

    – [The Virtual Door to Talent with Disabilities](#), and
    – [Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities (EOSD) – part of the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP).](#)

- The VRAB's recruitment communications, which are developed by the Board's Communications Team, are being written with consideration to plain language, with GBA Plus taken into consideration, and including welcoming, accessible, and inclusive language.

- The Board has plans underway to offer opportunities for VRAB staff to participate in VAC-led learning series on "How to Apply on a Process" for all employees, including a session tailored to persons with disabilities.

- The VRAB has also reviewed its onboarding materials to ensure they include links to accessibility-related supports, and how to obtain them.

- The Board's training team created a blended approach to onboarding new employees which can be delivered in-person at the office, live/synchronous virtually using MS Teams, and/or through asynchronous, just-in-time online learning using Moodle (the VRAB's Learning Management System). This blended approach promotes accessibility, including in the context of persons with disabilities who might work in-person at the office and/or from home, so that everyone can participate and feel included.

- This onboarding package contains three items – each of which are located on the VRAB's Moodle:

    – The first item, the VRAB's Administrative Checklist, contains eight items that provide step-by-step instructions on how to complete specific general onboarding tasks, such as registering for myKEY, etc. The checklist was written using accessibility principles from Shared Services Canada (SSC)'s Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program, as well as the Board's Accessibility Checklists and Resources document, which the Board developed in Fall 2022.

    – Furthermore, whereas new employees are given three days within their second week of employment at the Board to complete the VRAB's Mandatory Training Checklist, with accessibility in mind, an employee who requires more time to complete the courses will be given more time. Of this list of mandatory courses, 85% are Canada School of Public Service

(CSPS) courses that are located on the CSPS Learning Management System, which uses the D2L Brightspace – one of the best for accessibility, intuitiveness, etc. The mandatory training includes two CSPS courses which include content on persons with disabilities and accessibility, i.e., "Introduction to Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) (INC 101)"; and "Adopting an Inclusive Mindset at Work (INC 122)".

– Moreover, Board employees can provide feedback on the VRAB's onboarding program, as well as on the "Welcome to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board" e-course, where employees can indicate any accessibility issues or barriers they may have encountered.

## 3.2  The built environment

**Desired outcome:**

- The VRAB's head office location and Hearing spaces across the country are fully accessible.

### 3.2.1 The built environment barrier #1 – Maintaining and enhancing accessibility standards

Respondents to the Let's Talk Veterans accessibility consultation conducted in Fall 2021 expressed concerns regarding the built environment where Veteran Hearings are held:

- poor ramps,
- difficulty moving in a wheelchair or scooter,
- inaccessible parking, lack of parking nearby,
- need for more easily visible eye-level signage,
- lack of elevators, elevators not functioning,
- no street-level entry,
- a feeling of sitting too close to the panel ("being interrogated"), and
- seating issues, including flexible seating arrangements where you can sit facing the door (often important for someone with PTSD or other trauma).

Veterans Affairs portfolio staff with disabilities (which includes VRAB staff with disabilities) have also identified physical and/or architectural barriers, including uncomfortable seating and inaccessible parking. Furthermore, workspaces may not always include specialized ergonomic equipment.

The VRAB also reviewed the report prepared following the consultation series on Accessibility regarding the Government of Canada workplace model (GC Workplace). This series identified several barriers in the built environment (traditional office design). These barriers included:

- a lack of accessible washrooms,

– meeting rooms without sufficient space for wheelchairs or walkers,
– overly crowded kitchen areas,
– work points that offered no relief from noise or bright light, and
– accessibility in shared spaces.

### 3.2.1.1 Actions for the built environment barrier #1

- The VRAB will continue to make efforts towards maintaining and enhancing the accessibility within its head office location, via physical and technological improvements.

  Note: The VRAB's head office location has been built according to the GC Workplace model, based on inclusive design principles which resolve or mitigate many of the barriers that existed in previous, traditional office designs. The Board's design considers a wide range of physical accessibility and ergonomic needs, as well as neurodiversity.

- The VRAB will continue to make efforts towards greater accessibility with respect to Hearing locations in all other areas across Canada.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Senior Management Team,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.2.1.2 Progress for the built environment barrier #1

- In 2023, the Board launched its Hearing Room Project. Through this project, the VRAB is assessing and identifying accessibility barriers and improvements in the Board's Hearing rooms across the country.

- The VRAB recently established accessible parking for Veterans at its head office Hearing space in Charlottetown.

- The Board continues to offer Veterans the choice of virtual and in-person Hearings.

- On March 15, 2023, VAC updated its Ergonomic Guidelines. These guidelines were shared with the entire Veterans Affairs portfolio, including the VRAB, to assist staff in familiarizing themselves with the optimal setup for their individual needs.

- The Board has established an in-office ergonomic equipment lending library at its head office location. This library is available to all Members and staff who wish to use the equipment provided.

- The Board has prioritized and promoted continued ergonomic assessments and has invested in ergonomic equipment for staff. In 2023, 30 VRAB staff had

ergonomic assessments completed to assist them with optimal setup for in-office and work-from-home workspaces.

- An audit of the VRAB's head office was conducted on September 22, 2023, and found three areas of deficiencies in relation to the requirements of the Canadian Standards Association standard B651-18: Barrier Free Design for the Built Environment, i.e.:

  – several doors exceed the push/pull force maximum,
  – tactile signage is lacking throughout the premises, and
  – coat closet shelving is mounted slightly higher than the standard prescribes

VRAB is working with VAC on next steps to address the issues identified. As of December 2023, the Board had already addressed the issue of tactile signage by installing board room name plates and signs that include Braille.

## 3.3  Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

**Desired outcome:**

- The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) used by the VRAB can easily be used by all, including persons with disabilities.

### 3.3.1 ICT barrier #1 – Outdated technologies

The Let's Talk Veterans accessibility consultation did not identify any ICT barriers specific to the VRAB; however, VAC's Client Service Delivery Network (CSDN) is a Client Relations Management (CRM) software that is shared with the VRAB. This client data repository and processing system was built on now-outdated technology and does not meet accessibility standards.

#### 3.3.1.1  Actions for ICT barrier #1

- CSDN functionality is being improved and transitioned into more modern CRM systems, called the Client Service Application (CSA) and GCcase.

  ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2025,
  ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  ♦ **Status:** In progress.

#### 3.3.1.2  Progress for ICT barrier #1

- In alignment with the Policy on Service and Digital, the CSA will use a client-centric approach to guarantee universal accessibility. Throughout its development, each CSA feature will undergo thorough accessibility reviews, ensuring adherence to guidelines and an accessible, inclusive user experience.

## 3.3.2 ICT barrier #2 – Web-based applications

Some web-based apps are not fully accessible. For example, My VAC Account – VAC's online service platform, which the Board accesses to send letters and messages to Veterans – is not fully compliant with the European Standard (EN 301 549). The EN 301 549 Standard is the European standard of accessibility requirements in digital tools used to direct the European Union's decision-making in lifting accessibility barriers, which is quickly becoming a recognized global standard in ICT accessibility.

### 3.3.2.1  Actions for ICT barrier #2

- Newly implemented digital products get assessed against the EN 301 549 Standard. The Board will continue to ensure that all new software meet this accessibility standard before implementation.

- Existing digital products will get assessed against the EN 301 549 standard in the following order of priority:

  (1) public-facing products,
  (2) internal products with a known and immediate need for accessibility adjustments,
  (3) internal products of the highest use, and
  (4) remaining internal products from newest to oldest.

    - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing. VRAB to contribute to planned VAC initiatives to further modernize systems,
    - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
    - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.3.2.2  Progress for ICT barrier #2

- The VRAB participates in VAC-led initiatives to make web-based apps used by the Board (e.g.,My VAC Account ) more accessible. For example, the Board works directly with VAC's My VAC Account team to make accessibility-related updates for the benefit of Board clients.

- Furthermore, the Board will participate in, and benefit from, other VAC-led accessible ICT initiatives, including assessments of digital products against the EN 301 549 Standard, and recent work at VAC to release an accessible re-design of My VAC Account in Beta.

## 3.4  IT Operations and Security

**Desired outcomes:**

- The VRAB's Information Technology (IT) and Security systems are fully accessible.

### 3.4.1 IT operations and security barrier #1 – Software

Some of VAC's (and therefore the Board's) internal legacy desktop software (i.e., software provided by third party vendors) is not fully accessible. The VRAB is dependent on VAC IT, Shared Services Canada (SSC) and/or third parties to make the necessary changes to improve accessibility.

The following software used by VRAB employees is not fully accessible:

- Microsoft 365,
- GCDocs,
- Assyst Web,
- Genie Plus Library System, Master Subject Records Listing (MSRL),
- Iron Mountain Connect, and
- Foxit.

#### 3.4.1.1  Actions for IT operations and security barrier #1

- The VRAB's Systems unit will work with VAC's IT Operations team on any planned accessibility audits to identify fixes to internal desktop software and will take action where needed to make upgrades and/or replacements.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VAC, SSC, third parties, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.4.2 IT operations and security barrier #2 – Operating systems and mobile devices

Some accessibility features of VAC's (and thus the VRAB's) operating system and mobile devices are unavailable due to compatibility and security concerns.

Although Windows operating systems and mobile devices have built-in accessibility features that can be turned on by the user, any items that require deactivation by VRAB or VAC IT administrators require an alternate installation process or tools that meet the requirements of the specific user.

### 3.4.2.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #2

- The Board will participate in evaluations (by VAC and/or SSC) of additional accessibility features of VAC's operating system and mobile devices that can be enabled.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

## 3.4.3 IT operations and security barrier #3 – Purchasing processes for new software

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

### 3.4.3.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #3

- Develop a standard accessibility evaluation for the Board, with the assistance of VAC IT and Shared Services Canada. Incorporate this evaluation into the purchasing process for new software and hardware.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.4.3.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #3

- This work is being undertaken by VAC in collaboration with Shared Services Canada's AAACT group. VAC will continue working with this group to propose audit procedures and a scorecard. These procedures and scorecard will support VAC – and the VRAB – in the review and audit of the accessibility of desktop software and hardware.

## 3.4.4 IT operations and security barrier #4 – Technical training on accessibility features

There is currently no technical training provided regarding the accessibility features on VAC's (and the VRAB's) systems, applications, and devices.

### 3.4.4.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #4

- Work with VAC to use any planned technical training for VRAB Members and staff (where appropriate) on accessibility features of relevant systems, applications, and devices.

- ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
- ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
- ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.4.4.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #4

- The Board has promoted accessibility-related training available through the CSPS, including: "Making Documents Accessible" (course number - INC1-V46).

- Board Members and staff can also access technical training regarding accessibility features on the Department's (and the Board's) systems, applications, and devices through VAC's IT Training portal. This portal includes an Accessibility Learning Path for six software programs that are used daily by VRAB staff: MS Teams, MS Word, MS Outlook, MS Excel, M365, and MS SharePoint.

## 3.4.5 IT operations and security barrier #5 – Promotion of accessibility enhancements

Accessibility enhancements (to systems, applications, and devices) are not communicated or promoted to VRAB Members and staff.

### 3.4.5.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #5

- Work with VAC, and the VRAB's Communications team to identify, communicate, and promote accessibility enhancements to systems, applications, and devices, where appropriate.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.4.5.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #5

- The Board continues to work with VAC to identify, communicate, and promote accessibility enhancements to systems, applications, and devices. Any enhancements to the Board's tools are communicated by VAC through emails to staff of VAC and the Board, and often through more detailed and informative Tech Talk sessions offered by VAC. The Board also issues subsequent communications to VRAB staff in the context of Board events and activities to ensure staff are aware of accessibility enhancements that have been made available.

## 3.4.6 IT operations and security barrier #6 – In-home support

For numerous reasons, such as capacity, location, and health and safety, providing in-home support for tasks such as equipment set-up has not been possible.

### 3.4.6.1 Actions for IT operations and security barrier #6

- The VRAB will identify options to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, SSC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.4.6.2 Progress for IT operations and security barrier #6

- The VRAB will review options available to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities, including those currently being explored by VAC and SSC's AAACT group, which would see the Department contract out these in-home services.

## 3.5 Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP)

**Desired outcome:**

- The VRAB's Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) management procedures, requests, and internal software are accessible for all users and requestors.

## 3.5.1 ATIP barrier #1 – Software

The software used by the VRAB's ATIP unit – i.e., VAC's ATIP request processing software, AccessPro Case Management (APCM) – has accessibility issues for users. Furthermore, the response packages provided to requestors do not meet Canadian accessibility standards. VAC is currently working with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) to procure a contract for new processing software.

### 3.5.1.1 Actions for ATIP barrier #1

- The VRAB will work with VAC implement new processing software that is accessible for employees using the software and will provide accessible response packages to requestors. The Board will follow VAC guidance regarding the replacement and implementation of ATIP processing software and will align with the Department on its solution to ensure consistency with application support.

- ◆ **Completion of all Actions by:** June 2024,
- ◆ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
- ◆ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.5.1.2 Progress for ATIP barrier #1

- Procurement and implementation of the new processing software is being led by VAC, where a product owner was identified and started on the project in June 2023. The product owner is working with VAC Procurement to initiate the purchase of the tool and is developing a project plan to reach the June 2024 deadline.

## 3.5.2 ATIP barrier #2 – Written communications

The VRAB's written communications with ATIP requestors through email and/or letters is not fully accessible.

### 3.5.2.1 Actions for ATIP barrier #2

- The VRAB's ATIP, IT and Communications teams will work with VAC, as appropriate, to implement updates to email and letter templates.

    - ◆ **Completion of all Actions by:** June 2025,
    - ◆ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
    - ◆ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.5.2.2 Progress for ATIP barrier #2

- The VRAB's ATIP unit has reviewed its suite of letter templates to requestors for opportunities to clarify and simplify language in both English and French. Letter templates have been updated to make them more user friendly for staff, which allows the VRAB ATIP unit to respond more quickly while reducing user errors and being more accessible. The Board will proceed with ensuring the updated letter templates pass EN301 549 standards. This will include making the templates fully accessible when viewed by the client who receives them.

## 3.6 Communication (other than ICT)

**Desired outcomes:**

- All Board communications forms and templates are accessible.
- All published web content and communications products are accessible.
- VRAB staff are provided with what they need to design and deliver communications and events that are accessible to all.

- VRAB Members, staff, and clients are satisfied with the accessibility of Board communications.

## 3.6.1 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #1 – Concerns with communications

Respondents to the Let's Talk Veterans consultation noted the following concerns regarding the accessibility of Board communications:

- issues in navigating My VAC Account (which is used by the Board),
- accessibility issues related to forms,
- issues experienced in navigating the Board's website,
- complex language, and
- difficulty finding and understanding information related to practices and procedures.

### 3.6.1.1 Actions for communication (other than ICT) barrier #1

- Ensure that all of the Board's Communication material templates pass accessibility standards checks (e.g., use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker to ensure accessibility of templates created using Microsoft applications, use the "Check Design Accessibility" feature to ensure the accessibility of templates created using Canva).

- Include training on VAC's Communications Style Guide, the Canada.ca Content Style Guide, as well as on the offerings of SSC's AAACT program, when onboarding VRAB employees.

- Conduct a review of the VRAB's web content with an accessibility lens and make updates where needed.

    - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
    - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate.
    - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.6.1.2 Progress for communication (other than ICT) barrier #1

- In accordance with guidance from TBS, the VRAB has adopted the Canada.ca template and Drupal CMS, a web content management system, both of which are accessibility-compliant from a web perspective.

- The VRAB's websites and online resources are being built to conform to the web accessibility standards recommended by TBS.

- Furthermore, the Board has initiated a comprehensive review of its external website, with a particular focus on accessibility, plain language, and GBA Plus.

### 3.6.2 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #2 – User-testing

User-testing for the VRAB's external website does not include dedicated consultation with persons with disabilities.

**3.6.2.1  Actions for communication (other than ICT) barrier #2**

- Offer opportunities for persons with disabilities (e.g., VAC's Accessibility Network) to participate in user-testing of the VRAB's website.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.6.3 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #3 – Events

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

- The VRAB will promote accessibility features available to enhance the accessibility of virtual events (e.g., MS Teams closed captioning).

- In its communications around and invitations to VRAB events, the Board will provide participants the opportunity to indicate any accommodations needs and will ensure the accommodations are in place for the event.

- VRAB Communications unit employees will follow the Government of Canada's Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings standards and will seek to identify training opportunities specific to hosting accessible and inclusive events.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.6.4 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #4 – Videos

Not all of the Board's videos are accessible by default.

**3.6.4.1  Actions for communication (other than ICT) barrier #4**

- The Board will produce new accessible video content and ensure that future videos meet accessibility requirements.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** March 2023 and ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:**  VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** Complete.

### 3.6.4.2 Progress for communication (other than ICT) barrier #4

- In November 2022, the Board revamped its videos, ensuring they are accessible (for example, to include closed captioning and plain language). Moving forward, the Board will ensure its videos are made accessible by default.

## 3.6.5 Communication (other than ICT) barrier #5 – Brochures

While the VRAB's brochures are available in paper and .pdf format, the .pdf format may not be fully accessible.

### 3.6.5.1 Action for communication (other than ICT) barrier #5

- The VRAB is exploring digital format options to increase the accessibility of its brochures.
  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

## 3.7 The Procurement of goods, services and facilities

**Desired outcome:**

- The goods and services procured by the Board are accessible.

## 3.7.1 The procurement of goods, services and facilities barrier #1 – Procurement and contracting

Board staff may not be familiar with appropriate and meaningful accessibility considerations, guidance, or best practice requirements for accessible procurement and contracting.

### 3.7.1.1 Actions for the procurement or goods, services and facilities barrier #1

- Ensure that staff of the Board's Administration and IT units attend sessions offered by VAC Procurement (offered twice annually) regarding accessibility-related requirements in procurement and contracting.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** June 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VAC, VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

## 3.8 The design and delivery of programs and services

**Desired outcome:**

- VRAB 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 VRAB programs and services.

### 3.8.1 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #1 – Accessibility of forms, fact sheets and letters

Some of the Board's forms, fact sheets and letters are inaccessible.

#### 3.8.1.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- Ensure that all standard client communiqués (e.g., forms, fact sheets and letters) meet accessibility standards.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

#### 3.8.1.2 Progress for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- The Board has made improvements to the Compassionate Award Application Form to remove accessibility barriers. Moving forward, the Board will seek to make improvements to additional forms.

### 3.8.2 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #2 – Early collection of client accommodation requirements

There is no formal process between the Board and VAC, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (the BPA), or the Royal Canadian Legion (the RCL) to communicate a client's accommodation requirements. By collecting this data in an established/standardized way early in the process, the Board will be able to better meet the needs of those we serve.

#### 3.8.2.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #2

- The VRAB will consult with the BPA and the RCL on how best to identify when a client has accessibility needs in advance of a Hearing.
- For self- or privately-represented clients, the VRAB will develop a process to communicate directly with these individuals regarding their accessibility requirements.

- As required, the VRAB will adjust Hearing approaches to ensure the accessibility needs of Veterans and their families are met.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2024,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

### 3.8.3 The design and delivery of programs and services barrier #3 – Accessibility training for Members and staff interacting directly with Veterans

VRAB Board Members and staff who are responsible for interacting directly with Veterans may not have been provided clear guidance on how to deal with clients with accessibility issues. This includes:

- staff who answer client inquiries by telephone, My VAC Account or email,
- contracted Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, who are responsible for greeting, escorting, and supporting Veterans during their in-person Hearing,
- staff who support Hearings at the VRAB Head Office, and
- Members who conduct Hearings.

**3.8.3.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #3**

- The Board will explore training for Board Members and/or staff and/or contractors who interact with Veterans with disabilities to ensure they are equipped to do so with accessibility considerations in mind, including by:

  - – Considering additional training for Members to include with onboarding of existing and new Members and staff,
  - – Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility (INC115),
  - – Trauma-Informed Support Training,
  - – Mental Health Awareness WMT201, and
  - – Suicide Awareness Training.

- Reviewing and confirming the effectiveness of current mandatory courses for staff:
  - – Canadian Armed Forces 101 for Civilians, and
  - – Introduction to Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).

- Including accessibility content as part of the VRAB's Canadian Corp of Commissionaires onboarding session (offered bi-annually)

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Operations and Professional Development Directorate and Member Secretariat,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress

## 3.9  Transportation

The VRAB has carefully reviewed all of its policies, practices, programs and services, and has determined that there are not any barriers in the area of Transportation at this time.

# 4.  Consultations

The Board obtained the views of persons with disabilities in the development of this Progress Report through consultation with VAC's Accessibility Network. A draft version of the Report was distributed to all Network members for their feedback. The option to contact the Board through telephone to discuss the Report was also made available.

Members noted the following:

- There are issues with the accessibility of the formatting of the document.
  - These issues have been addressed.

- The Board would benefit from being more concrete when describing work that has been done on the accessible re-design of My VAC Account .
  - While the VRAB accesses My VAC Account to send letters and messages to Veterans, My VAC Account is an online service platform which belongs to VAC. Accordingly, work to re-design My VAC Account such that it is more accessible is being led by the Department rather than the Board.

- The Board could be more explicit in describing its plans to review options available to provide in-home setup of IT equipment for persons with disabilities, including those currently being explored by VAC and SSC's AAACT group, which would see the Department contract out these in-home services.
  - The Board has started work to learn about and leverage plans by VAC and SSC's AAACT group. The target completion date for this work is December 2024.

- The Board has not been clear regarding whether the letter templates or their outputs have been fully audited against the EN 301 549 standard.
  - The Board has clarified within this Progress Report that it will proceed with ensuring the updated letter templates pass EN301 549 standards. This will include making the templates fully accessible when viewed by the client who receives them.

The Board 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.

With regard to external consultation, it is to be noted that the VRAB did not conduct any external consultation on this 2023 Progress Report, as most action items identified in

the Board'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. The Board looks forward to meaningfully consulting Veterans and other external stakeholders on future progress reports and accessibility action plans, when more action items will have been implemented, and related progress on accessibility can be more readily and meaningfully assessed from an external perspective.

# 5. Organizational culture

**Desired outcome:**

- The Board is a fully accessible place of work, where Members and staff are supported in their own accessibility needs (if any), and have the awareness, empathy, knowledge and skills to support others with accessibility needs.

## 5.1 Organizational culture barrier #1 – culture changes and adopting accessibility standards

### 5.1.1 Action for the design and delivery of program and services barrier #1

- The VRAB will establish an Accessibility lead for the Board to ensure that this important work remains a priority and that it can maintain momentum towards these positive changes.
- The Board will explore ideas such as establishing a VRAB "Accessibility Adopters" initiative to recognize and celebrate employees taking steps to incorporate more accessibility into their day-to-day work and launching a "Storytellers" initiative to hear some of the lived experiences/stories of persons with disabilities.

  - ♦ **Completion of all Actions by:** 2024 and ongoing,
  - ♦ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Senior Management Team,
  - ♦ **Status:** In progress.

# 6. Training

**Desired outcome:**

- Accessibility training for Members and staff is offered regularly. Training documents created are accessible by default. E-learning modules are designed and created with accessibility in mind, so that all Board Members and staff will be able to fully and equally participate. The VRAB's training materials are available in various alternate formats, upon request.

## 6.1 Training barrier #1 – Promoting awareness and training for Members and staff

While the Board's mandatory training includes two accessibility-related CSPS courses (Gender-based Analysis Plus and Adopting an Inclusive Mindset at Work), as well as a course on Vicarious Trauma, Board Members and staff may lack awareness, and may benefit from additional accessibility-related training on accessibility.

### 6.1.1 Actions for training barrier #1

- The Board will offer and encourage Members and staff to participate in accessibility training, workshops and information sessions.

  - ◆ **Completion of all Actions by:** Ongoing,
  - ◆ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Operations and Professional Development Directorate,
  - ◆ **Status:** In progress.

- The Board will ensure that its onboarding program, and any new training materials that are developed, are accessible. This includes inviting onboarding participants to identify any accommodations needs, as well as to provide feedback in regard to any accessibility barriers experience during their onboarding experience.

  - ◆ **Completion of all Actions by:** December 2023 and Ongoing ,
  - ◆ **Roles and responsibilities:** VRAB Operations and Professional Development Directorate,
  - ◆ **Status:** Ongoing.

## 7. Feedback

Together with the publication of its 2022-2025 Accessibility Action Plan, in December 2022, the Board created and published three mechanisms through which Members and staff, and/or members of the public, could provide accessibility-related feedback: mail, email, and telephone.

In 2023, the Board was proud to launch its [anonymous online accessibility feedback form](#).

At the time of this progress report's publication, the Board had not received any accessibility-related feedback.

## 8. What we learned

At this stage of its accessibility journey, the VRAB 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 Board acknowledges that accessibility planning is a learning process.

This speaks to the importance of the cyclical nature of accessibility planning, not to mention the ongoing need to consult persons with disabilities. The Board 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 Board moves forward on its journey to become more accessibility-confident, the VRAB also recognizes that it must strengthen its performance measurement capacity. This is something that the Board will continue to work upon in upcoming Progress Reports and Accessibility Action Plans.

## 9. Glossary

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

**[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).

# 10. 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; accessibility assessments completed on those; and 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.

# 11. 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)](#)**: AAACT is a Shared Services Canada program that provides services and solutions to help the public service serve all Canadians, including those with disabilities. AAACT 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 (e.g., 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.